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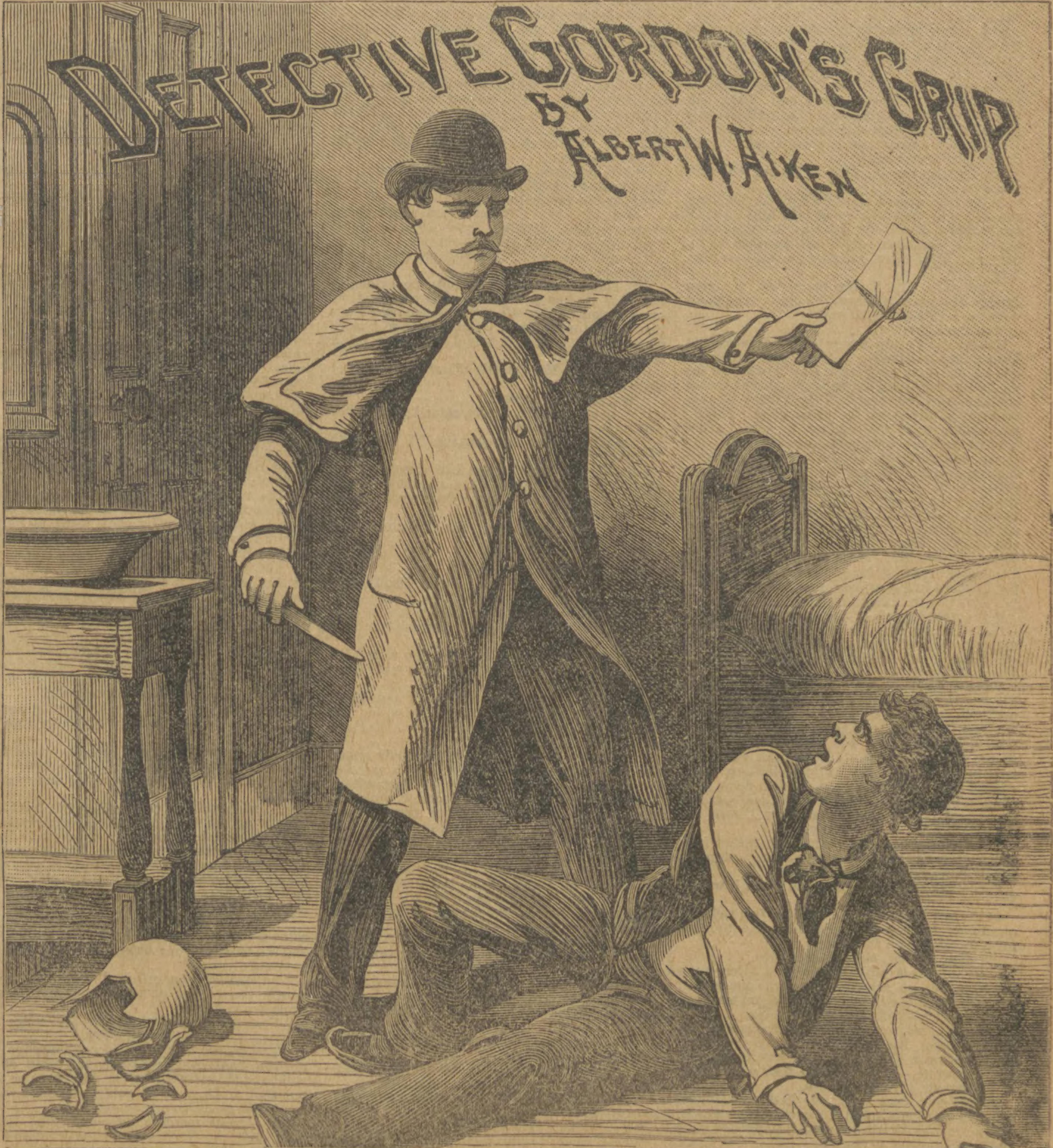
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Detective Gordon's Grip

BY
ALBERT W. AXEN



HE EYED THE LAWYER VICIOUSLY, AND I SAW THE DEVIL GLEAMING IN HIS EYE.

Detective Gordon's Grip;

OR,

The Shadowed New York Swell.

A Romance of the Revelation at
Dead Man's Gulch.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILL OF ANSON LIVINGSTONE.

In the parlor of one of the brown-stone palaces on Fifth avenue, New York, sat two men, both young, yet totally unlike in appearance. The first, reclining in a luxurious arm-chair, his hands playing nervously with his massive watch-chain, was a young man, perhaps twenty-three years of age. He was dressed in the height of fashion; all about him was rich, costly and becoming; evidently he was a favored son of fortune. His features were regular, his eyes a peculiar blue—the flash of which reminded one of the glint of light from steel. A long, silken mustache of yellow hue, the same as his hair, shaded his lip. The whole face was handsome, yet there was a cold, evil expression upon it at times—the look of one whose idol was self, and self alone.

The second man was a complete contrast to the first. His hair, which was cropped close to his head, was black as night; his eyes the same color; his face pale as death—an unnatural whiteness. He was dressed in a rusty suit of black, worn threadbare here and there. He wore no beard, but his chin looked as if it sadly needed the keen edge of the razor.

His whole appearance seemed to say: "I am down; don't strike me!"

Reader, the one in black is the one who now writes these lines.

Years have passed since Richard Livingstone, the heir who had just come into a \$100,000 by his father's death—for he was the one I have previously described—and I sat together in the parlor of his elegant mansion on Fifth avenue, New York.

What then had I, the hanger-on, the poor drudge of a private detective's office, in common with the wealthy Livingstone?

You shall learn.

But first, for a few words to introduce myself. I am called Alexander Gordon. My father was one of the first lawyers in New York. In my youth I received all the instruction that money could procure, was sent to Yale College—Livingstone and I being in the same class. There I graduated, with the highest honors. I had studied for the law, and, on return to New York, was admitted to the bar. Then my father died suddenly, and all his fortune, which proved to be much smaller than the world supposed, came to me. I was what was called a "good fellow," fond of a social glass, or a night's enjoyment with a party of friends. Need I tell the result? Wine and the smiles of false beauties were my ruin. Step by step, I went down the ladder of social degradation until one morning I awoke to find myself penniless and friendless—my health broken, my reputation gone.

My former friends—"heaven save the mark!"—had suddenly become near sighted, and passed me without notice, or else crossed over on the other side of the street when they saw me coming, and thus avoided me.

These things cut me to the heart. I would have committed suicide, but I frankly own I did not have the courage. Starvation stared me in the face; what to do I knew not. I could not hold a position, even the lowest, for I was not to be depended upon. I could not resist the temptation to drink. At the eleventh hour, when I had not tasted food for two days, fate, chance, luck, call it what you will, sent a friend to my aid. That friend was John Peters, the detective of No.—Broadway.

Peters had been employed by my father in a great many ticklish jobs, which came within the peculiar province of the detective.

He caught me by the hand and shook it warmly.

In a few moments he, with a few well-put questions, learned my situation. He thought for a moment, and then said:

"I want a clerk; come to my office."

I accepted his offer, and, after I entered the office, strove to reform. In part I succeeded; but, at times, the old vice would come upon me and I could not withstand temptation.

One day, after I had been with Peters some three months, Livingstone called to see Peters upon business. That business was to trace a certain person—to find if the person was alive or dead; and, if living, where.

Peters was very busy; the task was simple, and the detective asked if I would undertake it. I accepted the chance at once. I happened to be in the office when Livingstone called, and I saw that he had forgotten me. No wonder, for the change in my appearance had been great, and I shunned recognition.

I set about my duties at once. I had very little difficulty and soon procured the desired information—not only the information desired, but some that possibly Livingstone would have been better pleased not to have known. There was, as I discovered, a dark secret connected with the Livingstone family—a secret that, once known, would make Richard Livingstone as poor as myself. He was in my power. I felt it, and I gloried in it. "Why?" perhaps some may ask. I will tell, although the memory is bitter.

Olive Livingstone, Richard's sister, three years younger than he—a fair-haired, bright-eyed beauty, lovely as a painter's dream, cold as an iceberg, with the steel-blue eyes, the mark of the iron-hearted Livingstones—had been my betrothed bride. I loved her!—oh! how I loved her!—but, when my father died, and I came in possession of his fortune, which proved so much less than report had given out, I noticed a growing coldness on the part of my promised bride and her brother. This, of course, produced the usual result. I drank deeper and harder than ever. Then, in one mad hour, while flushed with liquor, I visited Olive, and the blow fell upon me. The lips that I had kissed so often, with all the joyous passion of a man's first love, told me that we must part forever. Bitter was my reply. I spoke the thoughts that burned in my heart. I told her that she was false, and that I regretted the hour when I had first looked upon her face.

Well, I knew the reason of my rejection. I was poor; that was my crime. Drunkenness could have been forgiven, covered by a golden mask; but, to be poor, that was a crime that admitted of no excuse.

I said but little, and left the house. But now, the hour of my triumph was approaching. I resolved that Richard Livingstone should give me half his fortune and his sister's hand in marriage, or the secret I had discovered I would give to the world.

Behold me now, seated in Livingstone's parlor, about to commence the interview which would end in my triumph.

"Well, sir," said Livingstone, a slight shade of nervousness showing itself upon his face; "you have procured the information I desired?"

"Yes," I answered, "I have," and then waited for another question.

His embarrassment increased; he evidently felt that it was a delicate subject. Had he known that I knew all the particulars of the "case" he had desired John Peters to "work up," I do not doubt he would have been much more agitated.

"You are in Mr. Peters's office?" he said, after quite a pause.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"Why did not Mr. Peters attend to my business in person?" he asked.

"No time—other engagements," I said, with Spartan brevity.

For perhaps five minutes Livingstone sat silent, apparently engaged in deep thought; then he raised his head. I saw by his manner that he had determined to know all.

"You have procured the information I wished?"

"Yes."

"Well, does the child live?"

"Before we proceed any further, Mr. Livingstone, let us understand each other."

"Sir!" he said, with a puzzled look.

"You wish to know the whereabouts of a child named—"

"What! you have discovered the name?" he exclaimed, the glitter of his eyes betraying strong excitement.

"I believe, when you applied at our office, you did not give the name of the child; you only gave the names of the people at Little Falls, who reared the infant."

Livingstone leaned back in his chair again, and from his half-closed eyes shot a peculiar glance at me—a glance seemingly of recognition. Well, I did not care; in the space of ten or fifteen minutes, I should announce myself. So I continued, first, however, drawing a memorandum-book from my pocket, in which Livingstone's instructions had been noted down.

"Case No. 40; to find the whereabouts of a child born at Little Falls, Herkimer county, State of New York, in the year 18—; the mother's name, Salome Percy; the father's name unknown. Said child brought up at the farmhouse of George W. Wilson, uncle to Salome Percy." This I read from the memorandum-book.

"That is correct, sir, is it not?" I asked.

"Quite," he answered, pulling the ends of his silken mustache and favoring me with a peculiar look.

"Well, sir, the child is living, and is a girl."

"A girl!" he started.

"Yes, named Salome, after the mother, and her last name is the same as her father's!"

"Ah! you know it?" the question came quick from his nervous lips.

"Yes," I said, cold as ice.

"Then you have discovered possibly more than I cared for you to know," and his voice was as cold and passionless as mine. This surprised me. But I thought to myself that he had determined

to play a bold game; but, knowing what I did, I knew I had him "foul."

"Perhaps?" I answered, laconically.

"You say the child is known by the name of the father?"

"Yes."

"I am somewhat surprised at that. I should have thought the mother would have been anxious to conceal her shame and not to publish it to the world by giving her child the name of her betrayer," and he bent a keen glance on me as he spoke.

"You are speaking in riddles, Mr. Livingstone," I answered, coolly, for I saw now that his "little game" was to hoodwink me. "I don't see why a lawful wife shouldn't call her child by its father's name."

"You mean to say then, that this girl Salome is the child of a legal marriage?" he questioned, a dark frown gathering on his forehead and the wicked light shining from his eyes.

"Exactly!" I came down on him sharp as a needle.

"I think you would find it difficult to prove that in a court of justice," he said, with a sneer.

"I could prove it, if need be, in sixteen courts! The minister is still living in Buffalo, who married Salome Percy to—"

"Hush!" he said, nervously. "Enough, that we know the name, without speaking it. This child you say is still living?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here in New York City!"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; I can put my hands on her at a moment's notice." Here I lied, because I couldn't do anything of the kind; still, he didn't know that. The facts were, I had discovered that the girl was in New York, and I had a tolerably good idea where she was to be found.

"You can do this, Alexander Gordon?" he asked. As I had suspected, he remembered me, despite the change that liquor had made in my face and appearance.

"Yes," I answered, without evincing any astonishment at being saluted by my name.

"You see I know you." He was evidently astonished that his recognition had not affected me.

"Yes; I expected that you would know me." Down on him again, needle-like, I came. "Now, as I said before, let us understand each other. Only a few months ago I was coolly told that I was too poor to be a match for your sister Olive. Now, I tell you, I have proofs in my possession, which will strip you and your sister of every dollar you have in the world, that will drive both of you beggars into the street."

Livingstone never changed color, or moved a muscle at my threat. I saw at once that my blow had failed; why or how I knew not.

"You are speaking rashly," he said, in a quiet tone; a tone that, coming from a man like him, boded danger. "What are these proofs you speak of?"

"The marriage-certificate of the mother and the record of the baptism of the child," I answered, coolly, throwing each word at him as though they were daggers aimed at his heart.

"You have these proofs?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" and for a moment he was silent. I could see that mentally he was preparing for an attack. The struggle was about to commence. I glanced over my plan of battle, figuratively speaking. There was no weak point—no loophole for his escape. The proofs were in my hands—proofs that could not be disputed; and, in my own mind, I determined that he should pull me up, or I would pull him down.

"You intend to use this knowledge against me?" he said, with a searching glance into my face.

"Yes!" I answered, in a tone that must have shown him that I had hoisted the black flag, and that he could expect but little mercy at my hands.

"Alex—I will call you as I used to in the old time, when we were chums at college together," he exclaimed, in a smooth voice—"it is better for us to be friends than foes. Forget the past, which you have more to lay to your own folly than to any other cause. You are poor. I am rich. Sell me these proofs you speak of. I will pay you well for them."

"That is all that can be asked," I said. Now came my turn. "Give me fifty thousand dollars and the hand of your sister Olive, and the documents are yours."

"Impossible!" he cried. "Olive will never marry you of her own free will, and I cannot force her to do so."

"Yes, but beggary may!" My voice was harsh; I would not show mercy.

"You cannot beggar us. I acknowledge that all you have said regarding the birth of the child and the marriage of the parents to be true; but that truth, even if published to the world, would not ruin Olive or myself."

His earnest manner staggered me. It was plain that my cards were not so good as I had thought. But, how could he escape me?

"This girl, Salome, is the heiress to all your father's fortune!" I cried.

"No, she is not," he said, quietly, "for my father, Anson Livingstone, made a will."

"A will?" I exclaimed, for I well knew that no such document ever had seen the light of a Probate Court.

"Yes, here is a draft of it in my father's own handwriting." He took a paper from his pocket and handed it to me. I opened it. As he had said, it was in the handwriting of Anson Livingstone. I read it through carefully. One item of it alone concerned me. To his two children, Richard and Olive, he left twenty-five thousand dollars apiece; the bulk of his property went to—but of that anon.

"You see," he said, "you cannot ruin us. I found this draft among my father's papers after his death. The will itself is deposited in the hands of a certain party, who will produce it when it is required by me. Now, you see how I stand. Make public the proofs you have obtained, you take from Olive and myself fifty thousand dollars, but we shall still have fifty thousand left; for then I shall at once make the will public. Besides, before I produce the will, I shall of course fight your proofs; you may have the right, but I have the money—and 'greenbacks' are a very powerful argument in some of our New York courts."

I saw he had beaten me. My weak point was that I hadn't the girl yet, and I might not be able to find her. I resolved to compromise for the present. I knew very well the influence of money upon some of our "upright judges."

"What will you give me for these papers?"

"I must first see them," he said.

"All right; come to my house, No. 42 Baxter street, to-night, and I'll show them to you. You won't have any difficulty to find my room, because there's only two in the building and I occupy both."

He took down the direction.

"Very well," he said, "I will come about nine."

I rose and left the house. Once outside I laughed in my sleeve. Cunning as Livingstone was, I had tricked him, for I had no more the marriage-certificate and record of baptism than he had. It was a ruse on my part, and it had succeeded. I saw that those articles did exist, and he knew it, though I didn't, but had made a shrewd guess. To-night then we would have another interview—another encounter of wits—not this time, though, in his brown-stone palace on Fifth avenue, but in my house, the Old Rookery, in Baxter street, right in the heart of the "bloody Sixth Ward."

CHAPTER II.

THE ORANGE GIRL.

FIVE o'clock found me located in my little apartments in Baxter street. The building in which they were situated was a small wooden house, built probably sixty years at least before the time at which I write. The first floor had been used as a sort of half-grocery, half-liquor-store, but that was now closed. Two small rooms over the store completed the house. Access to the rooms was had by a tumble-down sort of staircase at the side of the building.

The rent of the room being but a trifle, suited my humble means; and then, too, I had a companion—a man of Irish descent, by name, Pat McCarthy, by profession a lawyer; one of the class popularly termed "Tombs shysters."

Pat had befriended me, at a time, too, when friends were scarce. He was a large-hearted fellow—a man of but little education, but with a deal of natural shrewdness.

Our apartments were not luxuriously furnished. The outer room contained a little table, two chairs and a small stove; the inner one, a cot-bedstead, a single chair, a washstand—the drawer of which answered as a safe for the keeping of our papers—a tin wash-basin and a small tin pail; two battered tin cups and a large white pitcher completed our furniture and household utensils.

Pat sat opposite to me, smoking a short black pipe. In person he was a little fellow, with keen gray eyes, a short turn-up nose, and coarse black hair, which stuck out from his head like bristles.

I needed Pat's aid, so I related to him the particulars of my interview with Livingstone.

"Whist!" said he, in the full rich brogue peculiar to the South-of-Ireland men; "ye want a marriage-certificate an' a record of baptism. The first wan is aisy, but the second, 'twould bother the devil, begorra!"

"How so?" I asked.

"Sorra a wan o' me knows what a record of baptism is."

"Well, Pat," I said, "I don't know exactly in what form it should be drawn out, myself. Stay, though!" I cried, as a sudden thought flashed upon me; "a simple statement by the minister who officiated at the ceremony will be sufficient."

"It's a big head ye have on yer shoulders!" exclaimed Pat, in admiration. "By the piper that played before Moses, if I had education like you've got, barrin' the likin' ye have for whisky, I wouldn't call a queen my uncle."

"That will do very well for the record of baptism; but the marriage-certificate?" I asked.

"Aisy enough. I've got wan of a cousin of mine, now dead an' gone—rest her soul in peace! It's ould an' worn. I'll take out the names an' the date wid acid, an' put in the wans you want. Isn't it a beautiful idea? Begorra! I've the makin' of a judge in me, if I wasn't such an honest man!"

"That will do excellently!" I said. "Here are the names of the minister who performed the ceremony, and the parties married; also the other particulars." I handed him the paper which was the result of my expedition to Buffalo and Little Falls. "The next thing is to find the girl. She's about twenty-three years of age now; and a year ago she was living with a cousin of George Wilson, of Little Falls—the man in whose family she was brought up—at No. 178 Eldridge street. To-morrow I'll see if I can find her; and if I am successful, I'll start off for Buffalo again and hunt the minister up."

"It's a big brain ye have, Mr. Alex. By the Powers! ye'll worry Mr. Livingstone afore ye git through wid him."

"I'll try to, Pat. Now, mind, the paper for the record of baptism must be 'doctored' to give it the appearance of age."

"Aisy now!" cried Pat, with a cunning wink. "Leave it to me. I'll fix it so his own grandmother would take her oath on a stack of Bibles that she wrote it herself, by raison of the oldness of the paper."

A timid knock sounded on the door.

"Come in!" I said.

The door opened, and a young girl, with a basket of oranges and apples on her arm, entered the room. She was a pretty little thing, possibly sixteen or seventeen years old, with a peculiar blue eye—the shade of that color that a poet would call steel-blue; her hair, which was almost hidden from view by a hood, was of that strange hue, not yellow nor yet golden, but a shade between both. She was dressed very poorly, but neatly.

Nell, the Orange Girl—as she was aptly termed—was well known by all the Tombs lawyers, as it was in the vicinity of that gloomy pile that she followed her avocation and gained her daily bread.

Nell was a strange girl, not forward and bold, like nearly all her class, but retiring and timid. There was a modesty and gentleness about her seldom to be seen in those reared to the street life of the modern Sodom, New York City.

I had taken quite a fancy to Nell, and she to me; that was because one day I defended her from the advances of a drunken "rough," who had an idea that she was to be insulted with impunity. A well-directed blow between the eyes, which knocked him into the muddy gutter, convinced him of his mistake. From that moment Nell looked upon me in the light of a protector.

"Ah! Nell, darlint! is it there ye are?" cried Pat, who, by his merry, joking way, had also made himself a favorite with the Orange Girl. "Will ye trust me for an orange?"

"Why, Mr. Macarthy, you owe me fifty cents already," replied the girl, in a low, sweet voice—one of those peculiar voices which can only be compared to music.

"The deuce I do!" returned Pat, in a tone of comic despair. "Fifty cents! Oh, mushal! n' can't you credit me more than that? Is not the word an' bond of Patrick Macarthy, Esquire, worth more than fifty cents?"

Nell laughed, and for reply took one of the largest oranges out of her basket and held it out to the lawyer.

"An' is it for me?" said Pat, in astonishment.

"Yes," the girl replied.

"Do ye mind this, Alex? See what it is to be a man possessed of credit!"

Pat rose in a pompous way, and bowing in an extravagant manner, took the orange.

"Whist!" cried he, suddenly; "shall I give ye my note of hand for the debt? Maybe it might be of use to you; sorra use is it to me!" and he laughed heartily at his own joke.

"No, thank you, Mr. Macarthy," said Nell, smiling. "I'll trust to your honor."

"An' devil a better security could ye have, than the word of an Irish gentleman, an' that's myself."

Pat drew himself up proudly, as though the blood of all the ancient kings of Ireland flowed in his veins.

"By the way, Pat, you had better get to work on those papers. He'll be here at nine, and it's beginning to get dark now," I said.

Pat gave a low whistle, looked at me and then at Nell, and winked significantly.

"All right; I'll git out. A wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse. Oh, ye devill ye! Nell, kape yer eye on him; he's a devill!" and with this advice, and another series of winks, Pat went into the other room.

I laughed and glanced at Nell; she was blushing as red as a rose, and I mentally said to myself, what a pretty girl she is.

"You mustn't mind Mr. Macarthy's nonsense, Nell," I said.

"Oh, I don't, sir!" she replied, recovering a little from her confusion. "I know he is good-hearted and don't mean evil by what he says. Won't you have an orange, Mr. Gordon?"

"No, thank you, Nell. The fact is, I've no money now to pay for it."

"Oh, that don't make any difference. Won't you let me give you one?" she answered, quickly. "Remember that you have been very kind to me, and I do so want to show my gratitude in some way."

"Oh, nonsense! Forget that little service; it isn't worth talking about. Now, if I were like Mr. Macarthy, I shouldn't have the least hesitation about running in debt. I might, though, adopt the suggestion he made the other day and pay you—in kisses."

"Why, Mr. Gordon!" and again she blushed up to her temples; but, strange to say, she did not seem to be annoyed at the idea, as she had been two or three days previous, when Pat had advanced it.

"Don't be alarmed, Nell; I shouldn't try that mode of squaring accounts unless I were sure you were willing. And I've no doubt that you prefer ready money; it's much more valuable."

"Do you think so, Mr. Gordon?"

This was a strange question, and there was a strange tone in her voice as she spoke.

"Certainly," I answered; "can you compare kisses to money, for a single moment?"

"Why not?" and her voice was deep and earnest. "I should think that sometimes a single kiss would be of more value to a girl's heart than all the money in the world."

These words, coming in such an earnest way from her lips, surprised me.

"I do not quite understand you," and as I spoke, I looked full into her eyes—those dark-blue eyes—now so mild in their soft beauty, but which, if enraged, I should fancy would flash forth like a lambent flame, scorching in its fire.

Strange, too, somewhere before had I seen eyes like hers, but when or where I could not remember. I searched my memory over; the effort was useless; but, as I gazed upon her face, I saw that not only were the eyes familiar to me, but other features also, and yet I could not tell whom the face resembled.

"Do you not?" she said, in reply to my words. "Suppose, now, that a poor girl loved a gentleman—a man poor, too, perhaps, but still by birth and education a gentleman. Suppose that, in time, he came to love her, would not the first kiss that his lips pressed upon hers—the kiss that told her that she was loved—be worth more to her than all the money in the world?"

"Yes," I replied. "In such a case, I do not doubt that it would."

Strange were her words, strange was her manner. Could it be possible that this poor Orange Girl loved some one! and that some one far above her in social station? It might be so. Mysterious are the workings of the human heart. Love cannot be ruled; it springeth up alike in the heart of the prince or the peasant.

"Nell, tell me about your life," I spoke, impelled by a sudden curiosity.

"Do you really want to know?"

She asked the question with an eagerness that I could not understand.

"Of course I do, or I should not have asked you. I really feel interested. It's a terrible life for a young girl like you to lead. You must be exposed to a great many insults, to a great many dangers."

"Yes, I am," she answered, simply and earnestly; "and from one of the dangers you saved me."

"Now, Nell, don't say any more about that, if you love me!"

I spoke in a careless, joking tone, but my words had a strange effect upon the girl, for again her face was flooded with the warm blood, and a peculiar gleam appeared in the steel-blue eyes.

"Now, don't blush so, Nell, I was only joking," I continued; "but sit down and tell me the story of your life."

She complied with my wish.

"I cannot tell you all my life," she said, "because I promised my mother, on her deathbed, that I would never tell all except to two persons—one my husband, the other an old friend of my father's."

"A strange request," I said, wonderingly.

"It was her dying wish."

"Did she die here in New York?"

"No, she died in the little country village where I was born."

"And that was—"

"You forget," she said, with a sweet smile; "I cannot tell you all."

"Your mother did not come with you, then, to New York?"

"No, my mother died ten years ago, and immediately after her death I came to New York with a relation—a cousin of my mother. She was employed in a tailor shop on Fulton street. I learned her trade, but did not follow it long, for my health suffered by the constant confinement, so I determined to turn Orange Girl and gain my bread that way."

"A brave resolve," I exclaimed.

"Do you think so?" she said, looking at me with inquiring eyes.

"Yes, I do indeed. Few girls would have the courage to attempt it."

"But I did. I said to myself, I can but try. I did try and I succeeded. At first it was very

hard, for I was timid and almost afraid to ask any one to buy; but then, as I kept on, day by day I grew bolder and did better. Of course there were a great many persons—I can't call them gentlemen—who said rude things to me. I never answered, but I looked at them in such a way that they never dared to say them twice to me!"

Her eyes flashed, and her pouting little red lips, rich and luscious in their dewy fullness, curled in superb scorn as she spoke.

Poor child! Hardened man of the world as I was—profligate and drunkard as I had been, still my heart bled for her. Mentally I compared her fortune with that of the proud and haughty Olive Livingstone. The one reared in the midst of wealth and luxury, not a caprice ungratified, born to wealth; the other, born to —what? My reflections had led me too far. How could I say what she was born to? I could only say what she was; fate plays strange antics sometimes in this world; and from the mystery that surrounded the Orange Girl, one might safely think that she, too, was born to occupy a far higher station than that she now filled. Her language was ample evidence that her early education had not been neglected.

"Nell," I said, "do you know that I have a high opinion of you?"

"Have you?"

The words came quick from her lips, and a joyful light beamed in her eyes.

"Yes, I have indeed."

"Do you know, Mr. Gordon, that I value your opinion more than I do that of any one else in the whole wide world?"

She meant what she said; her eyes showed that, and the eyes seldom deceive. I was pleased, of course. I was beginning to take a strong interest in the little blue-eyed girl, who, with such innocence, confessed her liking for me.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Nell, for at present you are probably the only woman in the world who thinks of me."

"The only one?" she said, with a look of wonder.

"Yes, the only one. Perhaps, though, I have only my own folly to thank for it."

"But don't think about it, Mr. Gordon!" she cried, quickly, "for it makes you look so melancholy, and when you look sad, you don't look near as well as you do when you smile. But you haven't said whether you will accept my orange or not," and then she held one of the oranges out to me, with a bright, quick look and a little part toss of her fair, shapely head that reminded me at once of a canary bird.

"But I tell you, Nell, I can't pay for it!" I said, laughing almost in spite of myself at the arch look of those gleaming blue eyes.

"Why, yes you can; besides, I said that if you couldn't, I would make you a present of it."

"But I would rather pay for it."

"Oh, Mr. Gordon," she cried, rising and shaking her finger archly at me, "then you are too proud to accept a present from the poor Orange Girl?"

"No! no! I am not!" I exclaimed, hastily.

"Well, then, I'm too proud to ask you to accept a present from me," she said, with mock gravity, putting her lips close together in a vain endeavor to look serious, an endeavor that was defeated by the laughing eyes.

"But, Nell!" I cried, in remonstrance, rising and approaching her.

"Yes, I am, indeed; but you shall have the orange, and you shall pay for it, too."

She handed it to me and I took it.

"But, as I said, I haven't any money; will you trust?"

"No!" came from the tightly-shut lips—the lips that looked so dignified while the eyes laughed.

"Then how can I pay you?"

I advanced a step and stood by her side. Her eyes looked full into mine.

"Mr. Macarthy thought of a way. What I would not accept from him, perhaps I would from you."

A burning blush spread over her face; I was not blind, and the light that shone from her eyes gave me both courage and consent. The full red lips, not now compressed, but parting like a half-blown rosebud, showing the white, pearl-like teeth, were upraised to mine. A moment I held her in my arms, our lips met in a long-languishing kiss—a kiss such as my life ne'er before had known—and then, light as a bird, with a joyful smile upon her face, she stole softly and gently from my arms and was gone.

For a moment I stood motionless; then the thought of what she had but a little while before said—of the kiss that was worth more than money—flashed upon me. Her words were true. No gold in the world could have bought from me the kiss I had just received. I confessed to myself that I felt a deep interest in the girl who had just left me—an interest that I could not well explain.

It was rapidly growing dark. I lit a candle and placed it upon the little table. In a few hours Richard Livingstone would come for the proofs. Suddenly a thought flushed into my brain. Nell, the Orange Girl, was like enough to Richard Livingstone to be his sister. This

was the resemblance that at first I could not trace. It was remarkable, to say the least.

I looked out of the window; it threatened to be a dark night. I shuddered. A dark night in a great city conceals many a scarlet crime.

CHAPTER III.

A DARK NIGHT AND A DARK DEED.

I SAT down by the window and looked out through the dirty, discolored panes into the inky blackness of the night. As I sat there a thought came into my head regarding the likeness between Nell, the Orange Girl, and the wealthy Fifth avenue blood, Richard Livingstone; it was, indeed, wonderful. Could not that resemblance be used to aid my plans? This girl, twenty-three years of age, reared at Little Falls, New York, and whom I desired to find, might be dead, or gone to some distant part of the Union. I had no proof that she was in New York; that she was living in the city a year ago was no evidence that she was here now. Why should I search for her? Why not produce Nell, the Orange Girl, for her? The striking resemblance to the Livingstone family would be half the battle, and, backed by the "doctored" marriage-certificate and record of baptism, I could possibly force Richard Livingstone to pay me a good round sum, say twenty thousand, to keep his secret. It was worth trying. There was but one obstacle in the way—the age of the girl. Nell did not seem to be more than seventeen, while the real Salome would be, at this time, twenty-three; but then, looks are deceptive. Nell might be older than she appeared; at any rate, I did not consider the point strong enough for Livingstone to make a successful struggle upon.

"Good," I cried to myself, after thinking the matter over thoroughly, "I will try it!"

I went into the inner room, where I found Pat hard at work upon the papers—the papers which, if I played my cards rightly, would bring fortune to me.

"Well, Pat, how do you get on?" I asked.

"Beautiful! the acid has eat the ould ink completely, an' see how how nately I've put the new names! Do ye mind the three different styles of writing, the minister's an' the two witnesses'? The hand of the minister is round, nate and flowin', wid jist the slightest bit of runnin' together bethune the letters, like a man who writes a dale, and sometimes in a hurry, do ye mind? The hand is large, bekase he's got used to writin' that hand in his sermons, so he can r'a de 'em 'asy on Sunday when he pr'aches to his flock." Pat called my attention to this fact with an air of triumph.

"That is excellent!" I said. "Macarthy was, indeed, a splendid penman, one of those gifted ones in that line who could write a half-dozen hands and all of them different."

"Of course it is! Begorra! I didn't learn to make pot-hooks for nothing! Now jist look at the hand of the first witness—do ye mind? It's a cramped, ugly hand, like a man who didn't hold a pen bethune his fingers more dan onc't in a year; then the second witness is signed in a female hand, Bridget O'Neil. Jist look at that illigant hand! Musha! it looks like a spider had dipped his legs into an ink-bottle and crawled across the paper in a straight line, an' it's not straight aither, when you look at it. Do ye see my idea now? These two went to the minister's house to be married—it was a secret marriage; of course they didn't have any friends wid them, and the witnesses were the servants in the house; there's logic in that now."

"Very true; I do not think that Livingstone will for a moment doubt the correctness of the documents. If he does, I have another plan to worry him. I'll produce the girl."

"Yis!" returned Pat, with a wink, "the rael gurl if ye can; or if ye can't, another gurl will do quite as well. It's a head ye have got on your shoulders. Ye ought to go in partnership wid me in the law; an', sp'akin' of the law, what do ye s'pose that divilish old fool, Judge Kenine—I sp'ake respectfully of him bekase he's a judge—did to-day?"

"I can't guess; what was it?"

"Ye see, I was counsel for the defendant in a 'sault and batthery case, an' my client's case didn't have a leg to stand on—for he did batther the t'other feller like the devil—so, as the only way to git out of it, I appaled the case an' offered bail; it was only a trifle—a hundred dollars, but begorra! it might as well have been a thousand, for devil a cent did my client have, so I offered old Moses, the Jew 'fence,' in an illegant black suit of clothes, for the bail, an' the stupid old fool of a judge wouldn't take him, an' he knows, too, he's the most respectable-looking straw-bail there's in the district."

"So your client went to the 'Island' to rusticate, eh?"

"Devil a bit! Councilman Kerry kin in an' bailed him like a gentleman as he is, whin my client an' I an' Mr. Councilman Kerry all went and took a drink together, while the poor devil who was 'saulted and batthered was locked up as a witness, bekase he couldn't give bail!"

"Your client didn't have any money, you say?"

"Devil a rap!"

"Then how did you get your pay?"

"Aisy enough. My client is the fightin' feller called 'Curly Joe'; he controls tin votes in this ward, and he sold the votes to me, an' that's the way I got my fees."

"I say, Pat," exclaimed I, "you Tombs lawyers take queer fees sometimes."

"Yis, begorra! I take what I kin git, an' mighty little it is, too, sometimes."

"By the way, Pat," said I, examining the marriage-certificate, "the acid has changed the color of the paper a little—has made it lighter."

"Yis," replied he, "I noticed that. Wait till a little while an' I'll 'doctor' it for yeys."

From his pocket he took some chewing tobacco, laid it in the palm of his hand and moistened it with a little water; then, with the mixture, using the end of his finger as a brush, he proceeded to stain the whitish spots left by the action of the acid—then he held it up for my inspection. It was perfect.

"Good!" I cried; "that will do."

"Do!" he exclaimed. "Musha! I think it will. Now, Alex, I'm going to take a snooze beka'se I'm tired. I'll put the papers in the washstand drawer."

"All right! I'll receive our honored guest in the outer room."

"Yis. I say, Alex, make him come down wid the shekels, bad 'cess to him! Why the devil should he kape all the money, whin there's two handsome young men like you an' I that could make a good use of it!"

"Never fear! I'll bleed him like a leech, or my name isn't Alex Gordon."

Pat, with a grunt of satisfaction, stretched himself upon the bed, and I went back to the outer room.

I sat down by the window and looked out again upon the darkness of the night. Not a star was visible; the sky was black as ink. I thought over the interview about to come. There is an old saying that every family has a skeleton in its closet; the Livingstones were not an exception. I had opened their closet and held its secret in my grasp!

Again the thought of the resemblance that Nell bore to Richard Livingstone came to my mind. Fortune seemed to favor me here. If Livingstone was obstinate and not disposed to compromise, I would produce Nell as the child of Salome Percy; one glance at that face—that face in which were set the blue eyes of his father—the steel-blue eye, the mark of the Livingstones handed down from their ancestors—and I felt sure he would yield, and accede to my demands.

Strange, too, the feelings that filled my heart in regard to the Orange Girl. Her face, since we parted, had been ever before me; the blue eyes seemed always gazing into mine. There was no disguising the fact; I was beginning to care more for her than I had ever done for any other woman, not even excepting the queenly Olive. Was I beginning to love her? Love! folly for such as I to think of; folly even to dream of! What had I to do with love? I, a slave to liquor! I had not drank for six hours, and now my throat was parched with thirst and craved the liquid fire, which quenched the thirst but destroyed alike both body and soul. I knew that drink was killing me, and yet I drank—drank to drown thought—to remove the remembrance of the past. But I fought against the longing.

"No whisky to-night!" I cried. "I need a clear head and all my senses; no devil's draught shall fire my brain and make me a child in strength, a fool in reason."

I knew well enough I needed all my wit—all my cunning in the coming interview. Richard Livingstone was no child, but a determined, unscrupulous man of the world; possessed, too, of an abundance of money—money! that great lever which moves half the world.

The bell of the City Hall rung out nine sharply on the night air. Hardly had the last sounds died away in the distance, ere I heard a footstep creaking upon the rotten staircase, then came a knock at the door.

"Aha!" cried I; "that's my man!"

I went to the door, opened it, and Richard Livingstone entered.

"Good-evening, Alex," he said, in a friendly way; "you see I am punctual."

He was habited in one of the large cape overcoats, army style. I did not wonder at this, for though early autumn, the night had already begun to grow chill.

"You are on time," I said; "the clock has just struck nine. Be seated."

"Thank you," he replied, taking the offered chair.

I noticed that he looked around the little room with an inquiring glance.

"You are observing my apartments, eh, Richard? I'm not quite so weil situated as I was the last time you called upon me; I had rooms then, I believe, on Twenty-third street—one hundred per month. I pay five now; some difference."

I spoke with a careless air, and with something of a sneer, and the thought went through my mind that his money would place me again in decent society.

"I must confess, Alex, that you do not live in a palace," he said, with a light laugh.

"Beggars, Livingstone, should not be choosers. I have nothing; I live on nothing."

"A light diet, Alex. It may agree with you; but, for my part, I prefer Delmonico's. But, joking aside, didn't you find it hard to get used to this sort of thing?"

"No!" I replied, bitterly; "you forget how I got used to it. A man steeped in liquor cares but little where he lies; he can sleep almost anywhere. The police of this city have picked me out of the gutter many a night, or rather morning, covered with mud from head to foot."

"By Jove, Alex!" he cried, in astonishment, "you've led a deuce of a life. It's a wonder to me that you haven't killed yourself, long before now."

"I don't doubt that I should have done so, had my money lasted. I dropped gradually from getting drunk on champagne at five dollars a bottle to tanglefoot whisky at five cents a drink."

"Five cents a glass! Wretched stuff it must be!"

"Oh, no! It's got the fire—the sting—that's all a drunkard wants. Champagne is flat and insipid; it doesn't burn like whisky. That fires the brain and destroys the reason; a man forgets his past life. There's no Lethe like that produced by whisky. Many a sad hour I've avoided by flying to the bottle."

"You'll kill yourself in time!"

"There's no doubt of it whatever; that is, if I keep on in the way I am going now. I don't drink as much as I used to, though; I am trying to cure myself, but it's a hard task—no man can tell how hard until he has been a slave to liquor, and then attempts to free himself from the power of the tyrant."

"Do you think you will succeed?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I used to get drunk every day—that is, if I could possibly beg or borrow the money to pay for the liquor; but now I have forced myself to be content with three glasses of whisky—one in the morning, one at noon and one at night. In this way I have kept off the 'man with the poker,' who generally visits the reforming drunkard. It's a hard thing to restrict myself, and every now and then I break over the bounds and am lost to sense and reason for three or four days."

"Well, Alex, I wouldn't lead your life for a million," said Livingstone, with a half-shudder.

"I don't doubt it; but I am something of a believer in the Moslem idea. We each have our path in life allotted to us; tread it we must, whether we will or no."

"Perhaps it is so," he replied, with a careless shrug of his shoulders; "but let us to business. You have the papers that you spoke of to-day?"

"Yes," I answered; "they are in the next room. Mr. Macarthy has them—"

"Macarthy!" he said, with an air of astonishment.

"Yes, my room-mate."

"Oh! but don't be in a hurry. We've plenty of time before us. By the way, I often think of the good old times we used to have at college together and happening to think about them as I passed by the Metropolitan Hotel coming down, I stopped in and got a bottle of champagne. I thought it would be dry talking, and it would remind us of old times."

"Yes," I replied, absently.

I was thinking. I knew Richard Livingstone well, and this movement of his surprised me. I knew him too well to think for a single moment that any thoughts of the old college days had prompted him to bring this wine. No! no! he had a purpose in it. Was the wine drugged? Did he think he could "shanghai" me, and then rob me of the papers? Perhaps that was his object—for that he had some concealed motive I was sure.

"Got a corkscrew?" he asked.

"No, we don't have luxuries here, hardly the necessities of life; but I've a jack-knife in the next room. I'll take the neck off the bottle with it—clean as a whistle."

"That will do; get it," he said, producing the bottle of champagne from his coat-pocket. The "green seal" denoted the brand; it was a long time since I had tasted the sparkling nectar. The craving for drink was strong upon me; but I resolved that he should not drug me; he must drink as well as I.

I went into the other room and got the knife. Pat was sleeping soundly. I returned to the other apartment, placed the two tin cups upon the table, and with a clean upward-cut of the knife took the neck off the bottle. Up bubbled the foaming liquid, with its rich and rare bouquet—grateful incense to the genial soul who loves the life and spirit of the vine. I filled the cups. Livingstone drained his at a draught; the wine was not drugged then; so, without a fear I tossed the sparkling liquor down my parched throat. How grateful it was to my seared palate! I now guessed Livingstone's purpose; the wine was merely to pave the way—to put me in good humor so that I would not drive too hard a bargain. Well, I felt no malice; he should have the papers cheap—twenty thousand dollars.

My visitor filled up the cups, and again the

bubbling fluid oiled my throat. Oh! it was glorious! Again we drank, and then we talked of old college days, and drank again. The liquid put me in good humor, and, when the last drop was poured into the cup, I heaved a deep sigh. Livingstone laughed and drew another bottle from his pocket—a bottle of French brandy, a vintage fit for a king, pure as oil, strong as fire. If the champagne was good, this was glorious. Before I knew what had happened I was drunk—drunk throughout, except my head. I could not speak; my legs refused to support me; my arms hung idly at my side, but my brain was not all obscured; I still could understand.

Livingstone looked at me with a smile of triumph.

"The papers are mine!" he hissed through his clinched teeth. Fool that I was! He had made me drunk, while the strong liquor had had no more effect upon his clear, iron-like head than so much water.

He rose from his seat, and, cautiously opening the door of the other room, entered. I could hear the heavy breathing of Pat, fast asleep.

Maddened with rage I attempted to reach the door which Livingstone had closed behind him. The moment I left the chair I tumbled helpless upon the floor, but my brain was still clear; so I managed to roll myself to the door—I knew I could not walk. By the side of the door there was a small hole in the wall, from which the plaster had fallen; through the hole I could see into the other room.

Pat had left his candle burning, so that the room was light.

Livingstone had opened the drawer of the washstand, and stood with the precious papers in his hands! He examined them; a smile of triumph lit up his face; then he turned to leave the room. The skirt of his heavy coat, as he turned, brushed against the water-pitcher on the stand, and it fell to the floor with a loud crash.

Pat awoke from his slumbers, saw Livingstone, and, evidently suspecting his object, sprung from his bed, and would have seized the swell, but was met with a blow square between the eyes that felled him to the floor, for the moment wholly unconscious.

Livingstone did not take that opportunity to escape with the precious papers, much to my surprise, but stood irresolute for a moment; then, drawing from his breast pocket a small poniard, he eyed the lawyer viciously, and I saw the devil gleaming in his wicked eye.

Macarthy half-rose on his elbow.

"You bloody thief!" he cried. "I see your game; but it's small good it will do ye. Ye'll never git away from this room wid dem papers!" and he sprung again to his feet.

He had no time to move, however, for even as he arose Livingstone stepped quickly forward, struck him with the dagger in the breast, and with a deft blow of the fist in the face, again knocked poor Macarthy, now mortally wounded, to the floor.

Glaring at his writhing victim a moment, he very deliberately put the blood-stained blade in its leather sheath, and placed it with the papers in his breast pocket.

This done, he came again into my room, where I lay as if in a drunken stupor.

He did not tarry there. Having secured just what he came for, he passed out and was gone.

He had stained his soul with human blood, and now I knew him for what he was—a very devil in gentleman guise—a man to be feared, but also one to be run down to a villain's doom.

And that was my mission!

In vain I attempted to rise; my limbs would not support me, and yet I seemed to be growing stronger; the horrible deed that I had just witnessed had somewhat sobered me.

Then a terrible thought struck me; suppose any one should discover me drunk in one room, Macarthy murdered in the other! Might I not be suspected of the crime? What chance was there for me to escape?

CHAPTER IV.

A CAGE OF FIRE.

I HEARD Livingstone close the street door; the jar sounded through the house.

I lay on the floor a drunken fool, incapable of moving. My limbs were paralyzed by the potent power of the strong liquor I had drank. I was almost as helpless as an infant. I managed, however, to crawl into the other room. Macarthy lay on his back on the floor. Was he dead? No; for, as I crawled to his side, I saw that he breathed faintly. Perhaps the wound was not fatal?

Oh! how I cursed the liquor I had drank! But for that I could give the alarm and save, perhaps, the life of my friend. But now, in my drunken and helpless condition, a child of five years would be of more assistance than I.

Something must be done, or Macarthy would die before my eyes. Could I but bandage up the wound, he might live—live for vengeance on the guilty villain who had attempted his murder.

Again I tried to rise.

Thank Heaven, the liquor fumes were passing

away. I succeeded, with the aid of a chair in gaining my feet; but I could not stand alone. Supporting myself with the chair and moving it along the floor with me, I tottered to the washstand. With an unsteady hand I seized a cup of water that stood there, and the towel; then again, with drunken steps, I approached Macarthy. As I attempted to kneel by his side, I lost my balance and fell upon him; the water from the cup dashed full upon his face. With a deep groan, he opened his eyes.

"Oh, my God! what is this?" he cried, as he gazed around with bewildered eyes.

"Livingstone!" I stammered, with a thickened tongue.

"Yis, I know now; bad'cess to the devil! He's kilt me!"

"No! no! you'll live," I managed to say.

My power of speech was coming back; the liquor was losing its influence.

"He's got the papers?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, the b'aste! If he'd only given me a fair show for a fight, but the dirty blaggard, to strike me widout warning. I'll not die contint till I'm aven wid him."

"Don't talk of dying, old fellow! I'll try and bandage your wound."

This was a long speech for my thick tongue to make.

"Alex," he said, faintly, grasping my hand, "I'm dying; my time is come! The devil struck me in a nasty place. Oh, musha! Alex, if ye don't revenge me, I'll never forgive yees."

"I'll do it, Pat, so help me Heaven!"

I was getting a little stronger, and now knelt by his side.

"But the proof, Alex; ye want proof that he kilt me; fetch me the writin' things. I'll write a death-bed declaration, begorra! this is a poor place for a decent Christian to die, jist like a b'aste, on the bare floor. Oh, Holy Mother, save my soul! Katy, darlint, I'll come back to the ould sod afore I die, pl'ase the pigs—"

Then his eyes suddenly became fixed; before, they had been rolling wildly around the room.

"Whist, yer Honor! do yees refuse a decent man like that for bail? jist look at the black suit on him; he's a timber-merchant, my lord—I m'a'ne yer Honor—"

Then he dropped his voice to a whisper and chuckled to himself.

"Just as if ould Judge Kenine didn't know old Moses, the Jew 'fence.' Oh, what a beautiful thing justice is in New York City. Oh, Katy, darlint! I'll come back wid hapes of gold, and I'll make a lady of yees."

Then he broke into a low, moaning Irish song, that sounded like a chant for the dead.

His mind was wandering. I saw at once that he had not long to live; the assassin hand of Richard Livingstone had struck surely and deeply. The poor exile from the Emerald Isle would never again look upon the green hills of Erin, and "Katy darlint" would wait in vain for the return of her true lover who had sought freedom and wealth across the sea, in the land guarded by the eagle's wings.

"Whist!" he cried, suddenly ceasing his low song and grasping me nervously by the arm; "paper, pins and ink—let me write that I'm kilt by that blaggard, Livingstone."

With an unsteady step I reeled to the table, took a sheet of paper, the inkstand and a pen, then returned to Pat and again knelt by his side.

"That's good!"

With a painful effort he turned on his side—a groan escaped him.

"Oh, musha! I feel as if I was on fire inside; but I'll soon be put out. Bring the candle so I can see; I sha'n't need candles long."

I brought the candle and placed it on the floor by his side.

"Now watch me while I write. I want ye to sign your name as a witness."

With a painful effort he commenced to write—with a trembling hand he traced the following lines:

"NEW YORK, Sept. 29th, 1869.

"This is to certify that this evening, between the hours of nine and ten, I was stabbed in the breast with a dagger in the hands of Richard Livingstone. From that wound I am now dying, and I hereby denounce the said Richard Livingstone as my murderer.

"(Signed)

PATRICK MACARTHY,

"attorney-at-Law."

"Witness (signed). ALEXANDER GORDON."

"There," he said, faintly, as he finished writing, and with a low groan rolled over again upon his back; "promise me now that you will avenge my death. Swear that you will have Livingstone's blood for mine—that you will never rest till ye see the hangman's rope around his purty white neck!"

"Macarthy, I swear it!" I said, solemnly.

A low moan of pain came from his lips—he closed his eyes and a vacant expression crossed his face. He was sinking fast, it was evident, even to my drunken eyes.

"Katy, darlint!" he murmured; his thoughts evidently were wandering to his early home. "Shole, shole agral!"

He spoke the words common to his native tongue.

With the water I moistened his lips and fore-head then tore open his vest and shirt and examined the wound. But little blood came from it—a dangerous sign; it showed internal bleeding. I placed my hand upon his heart—the pulsation could hardly be felt; he breathed heavily and with difficulty.

"Wather! wather!" he gasped.

Again I moistened his lips. It seemed to relieve him a little; he opened his eyes; a faint smile of recognition crossed his face; then, with a great effort, the pain of which could be seen from the convulsive workings of the muscles of his face, he took my hand within his and pressed it slightly.

"God bless ye, Alex!" he said, in a faint tone, then his face began to grow rigid.

In accents that could scarce be heard, he murmured:

"Holy Mother, ressive the sowl of a poor sinner—Katy—ave—Marie—"

His voice became thick and indistinct; a single convulsive movement of the lips, and I was alone with the dead.

For a few moments his death paralyzed me. I could only remain by his side, stupidly gazing upon his face—the face of the only friend that I had in the world.

He gone, and I left alone—utterly alone—no! I had forgotten Neil, the Orange Girl. I still had a friend left.

But now to escape from this scene of horror. I folded up the paper on which was written the dying declaration of Macarthy and placed it in my pocket. Then, with one last look at the face of my once-jovial friend, I managed to rise to my feet and reel into the outer room. I gave a last glance around the room which, probably, on the morrow I should quit forever.

I had determined to go into the street and try and walk off the stupor produced by the liquor; then I would proceed to the nearest station-house and give the information of Livingstone's crime, and thus cause his arrest at once. I would keep my oath to dead Patrick, and hang his murderer, if it were possible so to do.

I reached the outer door, turned the handle, and—*found it fast!*

The door had been locked on the outside.

I was a prisoner—caught like a rat in a trap. I remembered then that the key had been left on the outside of the door, in the lock. Livingstone, then, must have noticed it when he came in, and when he fled stayed a moment to turn the key.

But what was his object? Apparently, to his eyes, I was in a drunken stupor upon the floor—a stupor which might last for hours. Why, then, should he wish to fasten me in? It was not to avoid pursuit on my part, that was clear. What, then, was his motive? I puzzled my already befogged and muddled brain for an explanation of the riddle, but no explanation came.

At last I gave up the attempt to comprehend the meaning of the strange movement on the part of Richard Livingstone, in despair.

The first thing now for me to do was to free myself and gain the open air. Had I been sober, the task would have been easy, for I could have smashed the panels of the door out in a few minutes, but in my present helpless, drunken state, I was as weak as an infant.

What, then, could I do?

I might alarm the neighbors and bring some of them to my assistance, but that I would rather not do. Besides, the front windows were securely fastened by heavy wooden shutters, while those at the back of the house, from which came the light, looked upon a small yard, and that was backed by the side of the tenement-house, and in the side of that house there were no windows. It was almost impossible to give an alarm, even if I could raise the window-sashes, and they were all securely nailed down.

There was no disguising the fact; I was caged.

A horrible thought—that I must stay alone with the dead all through the live-long night! Not that I was given to superstition, but there is a something about death that is terrible—terrible to think of—terrible to look upon. There is a nameless something in the approach and presence of the "grim king of Terrors," that mortals shrink from; and I must spend the night here, alone with the icy tenant of the grave.

The thought maddened me. No! I would make a desperate effort to escape. Reeling, I seized a chair and dashed it against the door. Vain hope! my arms were nerveless, all strength was gone, and the shock buried me backward, prostrate to the floor.

Oh! how I cursed my mad folly for drink! For the sake of the accursed draught—the poisonous alcoholic mixture that dries the blood and saps the life of man—I had destroyed my friend.

Had I not been a drunkard, Macarthy would have been living; in my madness—for the love of strong drink is a madness—I had sacrificed his life.

Then, in the bitterness of my soul, I swore that never again should a single drop of spirits pass my lips. Oh! if Heaven would only give me strength to keep my oath!

I tottered to my feet. How could I escape from my present prison?

No way! no way but to wait till morning and soberness came.

Then I heard a door close. It sounded like the door that led into the street, at the bottom of the stairs. Could it be Livingstone returning? It might be so, and his purpose, to complete his work by murdering me; for now I could believe him guilty of any crime. And I was drunk, helpless and alone—an easy victim! I felt in my pocket. I had a large knife there, half pocket-knife, half dirk, with a long, sharp blade, and a spring at the back, which once the blade was opened, held it firm in its place. I drew the knife out, and opened the blade with my teeth. Drunk as I was, with this weapon I was not utterly helpless.

I listened. I heard a light footstep upon the stairs, not like a man's heavy tread. It was not Livingstone. Who could it be?

The footstep halted at the door, and a voice cried:

"Mr. Gordon, are you in?"

"Twas the voice of Nell, the Orange Girl.

She would free me!

"Yes," I answered, reeling up to the door, "but I am fastened in."

"You are not hurt?" she asked, in an anxious tone.

"No; why do you ask?" I replied.

"Because, a little while ago I saw a man come from your door, all wrapped up in a heavy coat. By the light of the gas burning before the door, I saw his face; it was deadly pale; he looked up and down the street, as if afraid of being watched. He looked like one who had done something wrong. I was afraid that perhaps you were in danger, so I thought I would come over and see."

She did care for me, then, and I felt a thrill of joy at my heart as I heard her words. She had seen Livingstone as he left the house—seen his face, and could identify him—a strong point in the web of proof that I was weaving around him.

"Do not fear, Nell; I am safe; but I am locked in. Is not the key in the door?"

"No."

"He has carried it off with him. Where were you standing when you saw this man's face?"

"Opposite in the doorway of my house."

"Ab! then you saw his face distinctly?"

"Yes!"

"Could you swear to him, were you to see him again?" I asked.

"Yes!" again she answered.

"Could you pick him out from a crowd of others?"

"Yes, from a thousand!" came in clear tones from her lips. "He has not a common face; his hair is the same color as mine—his eyes the same dark-blue as mine. He looks like enough to me to be my brother; but he is a bad man: I know it by his look."

"Nell, have you any key across the way, that you think will unlock this door?" I asked.

"Yes, I have a skeleton key, that Mr. Macarthy gave me the other day, in a joke. I'll run and get it!" And then I heard her light footsteps as she ran down-stairs, and the bang of the door as she closed it behind her.

Now, then, once free, once again sober, and Richard Livingstone would have a bloodhound, on his track that would drag him down to his death.

"No mercy!" I said between my clinched teeth, "no mercy will I show him!"

I had strong proof against him—no loophole for his escape! I laughed to myself with glee. So far in the struggle between us he had beaten me, but now I held the winning hand!

I heard the slam of the outer door, but this time very faint, as though Nell had opened it cautiously. She been speedy, hardly time to have got across the street, let alone return. I heard no footsteps upon the stairs. Why did she not ascend? I listened. I heard a slight noise in the lower entry; then a heavy step. It was not Nell, but a man! What was he doing there?

Again, I heard footsteps—this time in the empty store beneath me. Then I remembered. A little side-door led from the entry into the store; the man evidently had gained access to the room beneath in that way. What could be his object? I could hear him moving about the room. He remained only a few minutes, then passed into the street, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed, though it seemed twice as long to me. Nell had not returned, but then, I thought, she lived at the very top of the house, six stories; to ascend and descend required time.

I waited.

All at once I became conscious that something in the atmosphere was choking me. I glanced around; the room was full of smoke; it was pouring up in great clouds through the cracks in the floor. I heard a slight crackling noise in the store beneath me. I comprehended it in a glance—the house was on fire!

I saw now why Livingstone had locked me in; 'twas him that I heard a moment ago in the

room beneath me; he had returned and fired the house to destroy me and the bleeding evidence of his crime.

Cursed villain, he would win at last!

"Oh! if Nell returns in time!" I cried in accents of despair.

The smoke came pouring up faster and thicker; then the long, shooting flames appeared, licking their way upward.

I was entrapped in a cage of fire!

No escape! I rose and staggered wildly to the door. I felt I was going mad. The smoke blinded and suffocated me; my senses reeled—my brain seemed on fire. Wildly I called on Heaven to save me. Heaven answered my prayer: the door was burst open; I was saved, and fell fainting into the arms of my preserver.

CHAPTER V.

WHO WON THE STAKES?

My preserver was Nell, the Orange Girl. With almost superhuman strength she dragged me down the stairs, through the dense smoke and hissing flames, into the street. Some friendly hand dashed a pitcher of water into my face and brought me to myself again.

On the opposite sidewalk I stood with Nell, and gazed upon my former home, now being fast infolded in the warm embraces of the Fire King.

The house was old and burnt like tinder.

The street was filled by a motley crowd attracted by the fire. The engines came dashing up, but their efforts were fruitless; and in a short time nothing remained of my old rooms but a heap of smoking ashes.

Macarthy had found a grave where he had lived.

It was near eleven. The crowd still lingered about the ruins. Those who composed the throng were night-birds all—the denizens of the worst and poorest ward in all the great city of New York.

I now had become quite sober. I determined to go to one of the cheap hotels and take a bed for the rest of the night, and have the murderer arrested the first thing in the morning.

I parted with Nell, and told her that I would meet her at the Tombs at ten o'clock the following morning. And as I parted with her, in the dim entry-way of the tenement-house, I again held her in my arms and again kissed her sweet lips.

I went to the Frankfort House and paid for a bed for the night.

Once in my room, I bethought myself that I had placed Macarthy's accusation carelessly in the breast-pocket of my coat; that paper of so much value; that paper that held a human life within its folds. I resolved to place it in my wallet, as being a much safer place.

I put my hand in my pocket; the paper was gone; I had lost it!

This was a terrible blow! I searched every pocket. Useless labor; it was gone!

Then I racked my brains to try and discover where I had lost it. It must have passed from my possession during the time when I was almost suffocated by the smoke. I had an indistinct remembrance that in my madness I had taken it from my pocket and then—what had I done with it? Possibly, when I fell fainting into the arms of Nell, I might have dropped it; if so, it was, of course, destroyed by the flames that consumed the house. The strong proof, then, upon which I relied to convict Richard Livingstone, was gone. True, I could swear to the murder, and produce Nell as a witness that Livingstone had been in the house. But, as I carefully studied it over in my mind, I became conscious that my case was weak. The strong point was the dying declaration of Macarthy, and that was lost, perhaps destroyed in the burning house.

What, then, was to be done? Livingstone had money on his side to back him, and money is a terrible power in this world to fight against.

Could I prove him guilty of the murder of Macarthy, to the minds of a jury, by the evidence of Nell and myself? I confess there was a doubt.

I resolved to go to bed; in the morning my head would be clear; then I would think the matter over calmly and decide what to do.

I went to bed.

Morning came at last. My rest all night had been broken by fearful dreams. Macarthy had appeared to me calling aloud for vengeance, followed by a child, or rather woman, that I had been in search of—Salome, who seemed to have the face of Nell, the Orange Girl. With tears in her eyes, she cried to me to search for and give her the inheritance that had been left her by old Anson Livingstone. Then appeared the face of Richard Livingstone, proud in its beauty, haughty in its pride; the face mocked me; a jeering smile was upon his lips; words rung in my ears, seemingly from him:

"I am your fate and will crush you!"

Of course, I was not sorry when I awoke. I thought over the situation. I counted the cost of an attack upon Livingstone. It was not to be thought of for a moment—should it fail, he would triumph. No, I must imitate the panther, recoil for a time to make my spring more certain.

I would see Livingstone. He, of course, would read of the destruction of my late dwelling-place in the morning papers—would think me dead. My sudden and unexpected appearance would, perhaps, throw him off his guard; he might be induced to compromise; to pay me a sum of money to keep quiet; that very money I would use to aid in putting the hangman's noose around his neck. That would be vengeance with a vengeance! Could I but succeed, it would be a sweet consolation for all the past.

I got breakfast at one of the cheap eating-houses on Chatham street, and then took a car up-town.

Arriving at Livingstone's house, I rung at the door, and when the servant opened it I walked in at once.

"Is Mr. Livingstone in the library or in his own room?" I said, with an off-hand manner, as though I had come by appointment.

"In his own room, sir," answered the servant, to whom I was no stranger, as he had let me in on my previous visits.

"All right," I said, as I walked past him and ascended the stairs.

I reached the door of Livingstone's room, turned the door-knob and entered.

Livingstone was sitting at a table at the further end of the room. He started in amazement at my entrance, and his face grew white as he looked upon mine.

"Alive!" he gasped.

"Yes!" said I, with a courtly bow.

"Not dead?"

"Not to my knowledge."

He bit his lip nervously. I had him at a disadvantage. I saw this and I enjoyed the triumph.

"I—I saw the details of the burning of your house in the paper; and, as you were drunk when I left you, I thought perhaps that—" he paused in his not over lucid explanation.

"That perhaps your intentions had been carried out, and that I had been burnt to death," said I, with a sneer.

"What are you saying?" he cried, nervously.

"Exactly what I mean," I answered, sternly. "You came to my house last night with the intention of getting me drunk and then of robbing me—"

"You are drunk now, to say this!" he exclaimed, his face growing, if possible, still whiter than it had been before.

"Am I?" cried I, fiercely, advancing toward him. "Look in my face and see if I am drunk."

He shook like an aspen-leaf at my approach.

"Richard Livingstone, you carried out your intention last night; you did get me drunk, and then you robbed me of two papers—"

"You have been dreaming!" came in quick accents from his pale lips.

"No, I have not been dreaming. Shall I convince you that I speak the truth? You thought I was drunk last night; you were right, I was drunk. You thought that my senses were all benumbed by the potent liquor, but you were wrong. I could not move; I could not speak; but I could see, and could understand."

He started; his lips twitched nervously; the iron band of fright was upon him.

"I do not understand the object of your visit here." He spoke quickly, as though he would willingly have seen me depart.

"Oh! don't you?" I asked, with a sneer. "In a very few words then I will explain. I want some money."

"Money!" he shouted. "For what should I pay you money?"

"For what?" I laughed bitterly at the idea. I could afford to laugh now, for the power was in my hands. "Did I not just tell you, that when I was drunk last night you took advantage of my condition and robbed me of two valuable papers? Those papers I intended to sell you, and I had determined to ask you, at the least, twenty thousand dollars for them."

"Twenty thousand devils!" he cried, and a purple spot, which showed rising anger, appeared in his cheek.

"Just so; twenty thousand dollars was the sum I intended to ask," I said coolly.

"You are moderate in your demands!"

He was beginning to show fight; so I determined that, in a very few minutes, I would put the "screws" on him and force him to a compliance with my demand.

"Yes; I was always a moderate man," I replied.

"You expect that I will pay you this money?"

"Certainly I do!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he said, angrily.

"You will do nothing else."

"Indeed!" came in a sneer from his lips.

"Yes, for I will force you to do it."

"May I ask how you intend to set about that little operation?" For the first time during our interview, a slight smile appeared upon his face.

"In a few words I will explain!" I spoke coolly. I felt a ferocious pleasure in knowing that this haughty villain was in my power. I settled myself down comfortably in a cushioned arm-chair, that stood near at hand, and then

proceeded with my attack, Livingstone watching me the while with curious eyes.

"Richard Livingstone, were you ever arrested for murder?" He stared at my question; the smile faded from his lips, and again he became deadly pale; the shot had struck home.

"Why do you ask such a question?" he stammered.

"Oh, merely for curiosity. What a sensation it would make in the fashionable world if it should wake up some fine morning and find in the newspaper the announcement that Richard Livingstone, of Fifth avenue, New York, the wealthy 'blood'-the living gold mine—had been arrested for murder. Why, it would create a ten days' sensation, and that's a long time for this city to remember anything."

"Do you dare to assert that I can be accused of any such crime?" Though his face was deadly pale, still an ominous light burned in his eyes; that light said danger as plainly as words could speak. But what cared I? I was sober now, not drunk, and I would have given something for an excuse to take this villain by the throat and with my own hands avenge poor Macarthy's death. With difficulty I kept down the rising devil within me, and answered him, coolly:

"Richard Livingstone, I accuse you of the murder of Patrick Macarthy last night at my house in Mulberry street!"

He started as though I had struck him in the face.

"You have no proof!" he cried, hoarsely.

"I have; I saw you strike the blow!"

"Last night you were drunk!"

"But I could see!" I retorted.

"My word is as good as yours. Who will believe you?"

"Do you wish me to try and find out who will believe me?" I cried, with a sneer.

"Ah!" A sudden thought seemed to strike him. "Am I to understand, then, that you will not move in this matter unless I force you to do so?" He asked the question with some anxiety.

"It is possible that my words might be construed to mean something of that sort."

"Ah! then there is something which will induce you to forget anything that you may have seen?"

"Yes."

"And that something is money?"

"Quite right," I answered.

"How much?"

"The same sum I asked for the papers—twenty thousand."

"Twenty thousand dollars?"

"Yes; you see, you might as well have paid me in the first place and saved yourself some trouble and your soul a crime."

"You have not forgotten your college logic, I see." He was actually sneering at me. Well, I suppose he thought he was out of danger now, and that he could indulge his mood.

Livingstone touched a silver bell on the table.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, when the servant appeared in answer to the call.

Then he went to the door, spoke to the servant in a low tone; apparently gave him some orders; the servant withdrew and Livingstone returned to me. A thought occurred to me.

"He's sent him for some wine; he wants to try last night's 'little game' over again; but it won't work now."

Livingstone resumed the conversation.

"Do you know that this proof you have against me is very weak? in fact, only your word; and between you and I, Alex, your word is not worth a great deal now."

"What you say is very true," I answered; "but, I have something more than my own evidence."

"Ah! you have!" he said, quickly; "and what is it? deal frankly with me; I confess I am wholly in your power."

I did not like this speech. I should have liked a bold defiance a great deal better. When a man of iron, clear-headed, hard-hearted, and totally unscrupulous—in short, a man of the Livingstone stamp—confesses that he is beaten, look out for him; his weakness is even more dangerous than his strength, for it conceals a hidden power—a power born of desperation. The danger that we can see and understand we can guard against; but, against an unknown evil we are powerless. So it was now. In my heart I felt convinced that Richard Livingstone meditated some desperate stroke; but where it would fall, and what its nature would be, I could not guess. I hesitated to answer his question. I thought for a moment; the more proof I could show against him, the stronger my hold would be upon him; so, at last I spoke.

"You were seen coming from the house, by a person who observed you closely and can identify you if necessary."

"Ah!" and then he pulled the ends of his long silken mustache with a thoughtful air. After a moment's pause, he resumed his speech. "And this person will either speak or be silent at your bidding?"

"Yes."

"Indeed, a convenient friend in a case like this." Another sneer; more danger ahead. Like the mariner on an unknown Southern sea, I could not tell where beneath the smooth sur-

face of the tide, lurked the reef 'twas certain death to touch; my only course was straight onward.

"Do you know, Alex, that I've been a fool?"

"How?" I asked.

"Why in this: that a year ago when I refused you the hand of my sister and you commenced the downward course that has made you a drunkard and a vagabond, I did not foresee my refusal to let you have my sister would rankle in your breast and turn you from a friend into an enemy—that I did not take measures—which I could have done then—to place you utterly in my power and crush you like a reptile beneath my feet if you should ever dare to turn against me."

The blow was coming. I felt it in my heart—but how! As yet he spoke in riddles.

"How could you have done this?" I asked.

"Oh! it was simple enough. You are aware that in settling up both my father's estate and your father's, a great many checks signed by me, passed through your hands and were cashed by you; so that my signature was perfectly familiar to you, and your face and indorsement perfectly familiar to my bankers."

"Yes, that is true; but I do not see how you could have got me in your power through these simple circumstances," I said.

"Wait!" he answered, the devilish smile curling his lips and shining in his eyes; "after you had commenced to dissipate, and began to run short of money, you frequently came to me to advance you sums, which I always did, and always in checks, not cash. One day, I remember it well, it was the 10th of September, you came to me, flushed with liquor, hardly knowing what you were doing, and requested a loan of twenty-five dollars. I being in a generous mood, or for some purpose of my own, drew you a check for a hundred dollars instead of twenty-five, you remember the circumstance?"

"Yes," I answered, unable to comprehend his object.

"How easy it would have been for me, in signing my name to that check, to have written my signature a little different from my usual way of signing my name, so that, on careful examination, it would look like a skillful forgery."

I started with horror.

"Do you comprehend? You were too drunk to notice any thing; you indorsed the check, presented it and it was paid; hardly had you left with the money when the bank officer happening to glance carefully at the check discovered the difference in the signature. I was sent for and pronounced it a forgery at a glance; but, sooner than convict my friend, I would pay the money and take the forged note, which now I have."

His voice swelled into a tone of triumph. A knock sounded on the door.

"Come in!" he said.

The door opened—the servant and two police-officers appeared.

"Arrest that man," he cried; "Laccuse him of forgery!"

In another moment the handcuffs were on my wrists. The game was over—the stakes, my life against his; for the present he had won!

CHAPTER VI.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

In the custody of two police-officers, I was at once conveyed to the Tombs, where I was placed in a cell.

I sent a messenger to Mr. Peters's office requesting him to come and see me. I knew that the large-hearted detective would move heaven and earth to procure my release.

My messenger gone, I was left to my own reflections, which were anything but agreeable. For the third time Livingstone had beaten me. It was of little use now to bring my accusation of murder against him, supported only by my oath and Nell's evidence. All would consider it a trumped-up charge made by me in revenge for my arrest. In chess parlance, he had the "move," I was now in "check;" the next move in the game might see me "mated."

What was to be done? That Richard Livingstone would prove me guilty of the forgery of which in reality I was as innocent as a babe unborn—I had hardly a doubt. The evidence was strong against me. I had no proof that he had given me the check. The web around me was woven with devilish cunning. I could not discern a single weak spot in the meshes through which I might escape.

In due time, my messenger, whom I had sent to Peters, returned with the information that Mr. Peters had left New York for the West on a professional trip and was not expected to return for a week. No hope there, then, and the detective was the only friend I had who could or would aid me. It seemed as if fate itself fought against me.

I thought over my situation calmly. Why should Heaven favor Livingstone and not me? I had the right on my side, and he naught but the black armor of guilt on his. After a moment's reflection I found the reason. Although with the right on my side, I had not acted for the right solely, but had tried to turn the circumstances which brought to my knowledge

the existence of the child Salome to my own benefit. I had betrayed the interests of the orphan to serve myself. That was the reason for my defeat; I was convinced of this, and I made a solemn vow that, if I escaped from my present peril, I would devote my life to clearing away the doubt that hung like a dark cloud over the good name of Salome Percy, and to return to her child the fortune stolen from her by Richard Livingstone.

After this vow I felt better; no more selfish interest, but a battle for truth and for the right.

I had an examination: Richard Livingstone stood before me in the court-room and swore stoutly against me. The proof was positive; so, in default of bail, I was committed to the Tombs again till the day of my trial, which was to take place in two weeks. I've often heard it said that justice was slow but sure; in my case she was fast and uncertain.

I had about fifteen dollars in my pocket when I was arrested; ten of those I gave to a lawyer to defend me. After a careful examination of all the points bearing upon the case, he shook his head doubtfully.

"Is there no hope?" I asked.

"Hardly," replied he. "The proof, you see, is very strong. Livingstone swears that he never gave you any check for any such an amount, and then the signature being different from that usually signed by him, looking in fact like a skillful forgery of his hand, and the little circumstance that you were under the influence of liquor when you presented it, will tell against you. You know a man will do a great many things under the influence of strong drink, that he would never dream of in his moments of reason."

"Very true," I replied; "then you think there is but little chance that I shall be acquitted?"

"My dear sir," he said, "I will be honest with you; there is for you not one chance in five hundred. Your only hope is in some quibble of the law, a flaw in the indictment, or something of that sort, otherwise you don't stand a ghost of a show."

"And if I am found guilty, what will the sentence be, do you suppose?"

"Oh, Sing Sing, from two to ten years—just according to how the judge feels and how strong the evidence is against you." He spoke in a careless tone, as though it was merely a pleasure excursion up the Hudson that he had been talking about. Then he gathered up his papers and left the cell. I saw from his manner that he believed me guilty. What hope had I then for an acquittal, when my own lawyer did not believe me to be innocent?

The clouds were dark above my head; no ray of light shone through them.

As I was wrapped in these gloomy reflections, one of the prison officers entered my cell and informed me that a gentleman wanted to see me. I could not conjecture who it could possibly be; but, of course, said I should be pleased to see him.

In a few moments Richard Livingstone stood before me. His cool gaze showed no trace of emotion as he looked upon me, his victim.

"Well?" I said, after he had gazed upon me for quite a little time, without evincing any desire to speak.

"How do you like your quarters?" he said, with a half-sneer.

"All places are alike to me, or to any man with a clear conscience. A prison-cell has no terrors for me; can you say the same?" He winced at my question.

"Do you hope for an acquittal?" he asked.

"No!"

"No!" he said, with surprise.

"Of course not. The lying evidence which you swore to, is too strong. I shall be convicted and sent to Sing Sing; once there, I shall think over my past life, and meditate upon my plans for the future." I said this with a voice as cool and quiet as though I had announced my intention to spend a few days at the sea-shore.

"Plans for the future! What are your plans?" he asked.

"Do you think I will tell you?" I replied with a laugh.

"Why not?" he said; "I am willing to be friends with you, if you will let me."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" I asked with a sneer.

"Yes!"

"Do you generally send your friends to the State Prison? Is that your idea of friendship?"

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature; you attacked me; I acted in self-defense solely. Had you acted differently, I should have done so, too."

"That may be," I said, with a sneer.

"It is true!" he answered, earnestly; "but, enough of this. I did not come here to taunt, but to offer you my services."

"In what way, and what price am I to pay for your valuable assistance?"

He did not mind my covert sneer, but went on in his speech.

"The papers I got from your house—"

"That you thieved from my house, you mean!" cried I, defiantly.

"Never mind the means," he answered, quiet-

ly; "the end justifies them. The fact remains: I have them."

"Well?" I said, as he paused.

"These papers—the marriage-certificate of Salome Percy, and the record of baptism of her child are forgeries."

His discovery of this fact now, mattered but little to me.

"Do you think so?" I asked.

"I know so!" he answered.

"May I ask how you discovered it?"

"Yes; in searching over my father's papers I discovered a letter from the minister, and his signature is entirely different from that attached to the marriage-certificate and the record of baptism."

"Ah!" I said, coolly.

"You have those papers—the genuine ones—I am certain of it, and you tricked me with the false documents. Now, I have come to make you an offer."

"Is it possible?" I cried, in affected astonishment. "Why, I thought you had just dropped in to pay me a friendly visit; and to think, now, that selfish, personal interest was at the bottom of it!"

"Enough of jesting—I am here to act the part of a friend—"

"You'll be a failure in that line, I'm afraid. If you want to do anything in the way of acting, let me suggest Iago in the play of Othello; he's much more in your way, being a false friend and a black-hearted villain to boot. He'd just suit you." He was annoyed at my remarks, and showed it in his face.

"What I am and what I have done, I myself will answer for. It concerns me alone."

"I beg your pardon—" said with an air of extravagant politeness; "it does concern me, as I shall probably go to Sing Sing for a term of years surely on your account."

"It is more than probable—you will go!"

"Are you sure of it?" I asked.

"Quite; I rode out to Central Park yesterday, with Judge Kenine. Among other things, we spoke of your case, and the judge said it was his opinion that you ought to go to Sing Sing for about five years."

"Ah!" the villain had a motive in telling me this. What was it?

"And, as he is on the bench at your trial, it is extremely possible that his ideas will be carried out."

"What is your motive for telling me this? I'm no fool—I know very well that I'm sure to go up the river; but, why do you want to come and tell me of it? Is it to show me you've got the best of it?"

"No, not for that purpose alone. I want to make a bargain with you." The secret was out; he wanted something.

"Well, what is the bargain?" I asked.

"The genuine papers relating to Salome Percy and her child, that you have; I want them."

It was evident that he firmly believed I had them. I resolved to humor his belief, because if he should happen to discover that I did not possess those valuable documents, he, of course, would search for them; and, with the aid of the detective police, might find them; therefore it was for my interest to keep up the deception.

"What can you offer me for them?" I asked.

"Money is of little use to me now, for the State of New York, in her generosity, will probably provide me with board and lodging gratis, for a few years to come, at least; and you cannot very well withdraw your forgery charge against me without convicting yourself of perjury."

"But, suppose I could procure your pardon from the governor, after you had served a few months? Such things can be done, you know, very easily." His manner showed his anxiety to get the precious documents within his clutches. I couldn't very well accept his offer, for the best of all possible reasons: I didn't have the papers. But this afforded me a capital chance for what, in the language of the drama, would be called an "effective situation;" and, to use our soldier idiom, "I went for it."

"Richard Livingstone, I would not wrong the orphan child, Salome, even to save myself from Sing Sing prison. Five years are soon passed; they will not last forever. I'll come out of that prison as I entered it, your bitter, unrelenting enemy, and I'll hunt you down, through all the devious windings of your crimes, until I strip you of every dollar you have in the world and place the hangman's noose around your neck."

Livingstone listened, unmoved, to my threat.

"Words are air, and air is nothing; your threats are wasted on me. In five years' time, I will remove all traces of this Salome; I shall set the detectives on the track at once. As for the hanging threat I laugh at that. You can never prove me guilty!"

"Then I'll kill you with my own hand!" I said, through my close set teeth. My eyes told him that I was in earnest, and for a moment his cheek blanched; then without a word, he turned upon his heel and left the cell.

I did not see him again until he entered the witness-stand on the day of my trial.

The two weeks that intervened between my

interview with Livingstone and the day of my trial passed slowly enough. Strange to say, Nell, the Orange Girl, was in my thoughts nearly all the time. The blue eyes were ever gazing into mine. I determined to see her if possible.

I sent a messenger to her to tell her where I was; he returned with the information that she had left the city. Strange that she should go away without trying to see me, yet how could she tell where I was?

At last the day of my trial came. The trial was a mere farce. I had no evidence to offer in my defense, and I was sentenced to Sing Sing for five years.

For five years, then, Livingstone would rest secure in his triumph, and I must go on nursing my hate day by day, until the hour came to wreak my vengeance upon him.

Behold me then, one bright September morning, seated in the smoking-car of the 2:00 P.M. train on the Hudson River Railroad, bound for the prison at Sing Sing, handcuffed, and in the custody of a stout officer.

Five years in a man's life is a long time. Should I waste five years of my life in a prison after I had already wasted so much of it in drink and dissipation! Never! Hardly had our train left the depot, when a plan of escape flashed upon my mind.

I was apparently securely handcuffed; but, fortunately for me, I possessed a slender, delicate pair of hands, while the handcuffs were designed for wrists of the usual size; therefore, quietly, and without exciting the notice of the officer by my side, who was busily engaged in "wrestling" with a pipe of huge dimensions, I found it at I could, with a slight effort, slip my hands through the handcuffs. So far, so good. I had my plan of escape fully developed in my mind. The train was now approaching Fort Washington. I knew the locality well; as a boy I had fished and swam in almost every rod of the river from Fifty-first street up to Spuyten Duyvel creek.

When the train stopped at Fort Washington, the officer's attention was taken up by some passengers entering the train; so I quietly slipped my right hand out of the handcuff. I was sitting next to the open window, and by pretending to look out, and turning sideways, I was able to accomplish this without detection.

On went the train again; we were near Spuyten Duyvel creek; in a few minutes more we would be on the trestle-work; that was the golden moment. Just before the train reached the bridge over the creek, a passenger passed through the car and left the door open behind him; the officer bent forward—we were in the first seat—to close the door; quick as lightning, I drew back my right hand, and, with all my strength, struck him a terrific blow under the ear, which knocked him clean across the car, and buried him, senseless, against its side; the train thundered over the bridge, and I sprang head foremost through the open window. It was in truth a leap for life, for I knew I should not survive five years in Sing Sing. Heels over head, turned by the motion of the train, as I leaped from it, I went swiftly through the air, splashing into the waters of Spuyten Duyvel creek, which received me in their chill embraces and broke my fall. I was but a few rods from the shore. I struck out lustily for it. The water was cold as ice. The shore reached, I ran quickly down the river—fortune favors the bold they say—for a few hundred yards on I found a fishing-boat, oars and all, on the beach. It was fastened to a stake by a common slip-knot; it required but a second to unloose it, and in another I was in the boat and was pulling lustily down the stream. Luckily the tide was with me. I heard the train stop, and then began to back up. By the time it had reached the trestle-work, I had got round the little bend in the river, and was hid from their sight. As soon as I thought it safe to do so, I headed the boat for the Jersey shore. The train had again proceeded on its way; and, as its noise died away in the distance, I thanked Heaven for my escape.

Now then, Livingstone, look to yourself, for the bloodhound is on your track!

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE TRACK AGAIN.

THE bow of the boat grated on the Jersey shore; the sound was to me the symbol of my freedom. I was not pursued, that was evident. They probably imagined me dead in the waters of Spuyten Duyvel Creek.

But though free, I was not yet safe. I knew Livingstone too well to think for a single moment that he would be satisfied until he received certain proofs of my death.

I left the boat on the shore, and climbed the steep hill, until I gained a rocky ledge, fringed from view, by a heavy growth of trees. The sun shone bright on the rock. I stripped off my clothes and wrung them out as dry as I could, and then spread them out in the sun to dry, while I sat patiently on the rock—which, by the way, was exceedingly uncomfortable—and waited.

I thought over my situation. What should I do? The sentence still hanging over me, I had escaped, for how long? That was the question.

Livingstone would probably read the account of my escape in the morning paper. Nothing, then, was to be feared of him until the morrow. If I could elude the vigilance of the police—which, by the way, would probably be more devoted to searching for me in the vicinity of Spuyten Duyvel than in the city of New York itself—I had time to escape to the West. But on the morrow—in fact, the very moment Livingstone heard of my escape—he would set the detectives on my track; so, before another sun, to use a familiar expression, I must “git.”

But to fly required money, and I had none. What was to be done?

Peters, the detective! The thought came to me like a flash. He was my friend, and would aid me. But if he was still absent? Ah! there was the rub. Possibly, however, by this time he had returned; if so, my escape was certain. I would go to him at once, and tell him all.

When I finally had concluded upon my course of action, my clothes were dry enough to put on.

Once dressed, I walked down the bank of the river until I came to the Weehawken Ferry at Forty-second street. I crossed to the city; then I took a car down-town. I had on quite a decent suit of black, and, on arriving in Chatham street, I stepped into one of the second-hand clothing stores that abound there, and offered to swap off my black suit for a common one, and a little money to boot, representing myself as being in that peculiar interesting state, financially known as “hard-up.”

The keen Jew, the master of the shop, had a sharp eye to a bargain, and we soon struck a trade, the result of which was that I left the store with a seedy-looking gray suit, and ten dollars in my pocket. Of course I had much the worse of the bargain; in fact, got decidedly swindled—but the suit was a disguise, and that was what I wanted.

Then I stepped into a barber-shop and bought a yellow-haired wig, the hair of which curled into little kinky curls, that I saw exposed for sale in the window. That cost me eight dollars, and thus pretty near used up my funds.

My next purchase was a little pair of scissors; then, in another barber-shop, I invested in a little yellow mustache. I wore no beard of any kind myself. Then I bought a little mirror and a small package of Chinese vermillion.

Now for a place to exchange the expression of my face.

I walked down Chatham street, till I came to the Park, crossed over the Park to Murray street. Then I went into one of the large buildings on Broadway, near the corner of Murray, walked up to the top floor; the lofts there happened to be unoccupied, so that I was not likely to be disturbed by any one coming either up or down.

There I made my toilet. First, with the little scissors I cut off all the hair of my eyebrows and then cut off the eyelashes. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I wondered at the change that this little operation had made in my personal appearance—it was wonderful. Then with my finger I applied the Chinese vermillion to my cheeks and forehead, using it daintily, and just staining the skin as though burnt by the sun. Then I put on the wig—it fitted me nicely. The kinky little curls stuck out in all directions. With the scissors I trimmed the mustache down, until it looked like one that a youth of twenty would cultivate. Then I moistened the mucilage attached to its back and applied it to my upper lip. When it dried, as it did in a moment, it looked quite nice, and as I had trimmed it down so small, quite natural.

I surveyed myself carefully in the little mirror. My experiment was a complete success. I had entirely altered my appearance. In fact, so changed was I, that I would have dared to face Richard Livingstone himself.

I descended into the street again, pulling my brown slouch hat, that I had exchanged my natty little cap for, at the jew's shop, down over my eyes.

I glanced up at the City Hall clock; it wanted a few minutes of six. It was getting late. I walked rapidly up Broadway. Peters's office was near Broome street. I had hopes that I would find him in, as I knew he seldom left the office, unless called away on business, until about half-past six.

It was about ten minutes past six when I arrived at the corner of Broome street.

I had my eyes about me, and I noticed a seedy-looking fellow, sucking a quill toothpick, lounging about the doorway that led to Peters's room. His face was familiar to me. I searched my memory over, and then recalled the circumstance that I had once seen him in company with McCarthy at the Tombs. Possibly, then, he was a detective, or a spy of one. “The thief doth fear each bush an officer,” and, though not exactly a thief, still, in the peculiar position in which, by the force of circumstances, I had been placed, to me an officer and a foe were one and the same.

How could I avoid this watcher, and get up stairs without being seen by him? I had con-

fidence in my disguise; but still, on the whole, it was just as well not to test it any more than I could help.

Men speak of a “streak of luck.” It was evident to me I had just struck that streak. First, my escape from that car; then, the finding of the boat; and now, just as I was praying to fortune to take the seedy-dressed man with the quill toothpick out of the entry-way, an omnibus horse slipped down right before the door at which the man stood. Of course there was an instant commotion; down jumped the driver from his seat, and attempted to raise the fallen brute; unsuccessful was the attempt. A crowd began to gather round—it doesn't take much to raise a crowd in New York. Various were the suggestions given—various were the attempts made. The seedy-looking man had left the entry-way, and had advanced slowly to the edge of the sidewalk. Duty evidently struggled with inclination; duty said, “Stay at your post!” Inclination whispered, “Show them how to get the horse up, and astonish the crowd!” To the free-born American, there is nothing more delightful than being the oracle of an admiring crowd.

Inclination triumphed, for the “spy”—such I considered him, and of course call him so—stepped off the curbstone, and with an air of brisk dignity, walked into the crowd.

“Say! kin yer git the boss up? Just loosen that strap there, and—”

I didn't wait to hear any more, but darted across the street, into the entry-way, and upstairs. Lucky chance! Fortune, at last, was on my side. I laughed in my sleeve at the idea that, in a few minutes, the “spy” would return and resume his position and his watch, while his prey would be safely hidden up-stairs.

I knocked at the door of Peters's room; his own voice said—“Come in!”

I opened the door and entered. Peters was reading a newspaper by the window.

“Mr. Peters?” I said, determined to try the completeness of the disguise. He started at my voice; dropped his newspaper, and advanced toward me, surveying me with a puzzled look.

“My name is Peters, sir,” he said. “I beg your pardon, but your voice is strangely familiar to me.”

“Indeed?” This was a triumph for my disguise—to baffle the keen eyes of John Peters, Esq., the smartest detective in New York City.

“By Jove!” he cried, after coming close to and looking at me for a moment earnestly. His puzzled look disappeared. “Alex Gordon, or my name's not John!”

He took me by the hand and shook it heartily.

“How did you discover me?” I asked.

“By the eyes and voice. It's a devilish good get-up. Ginger! if you keep on you'll be an honor to the detective profession.”

“You knew my eyes and voice, then?”

“Yes,” he replied; “a man can't very well change his eyes; and remembering eyes is my strong point. Another thing helped me, too; I expected to see you.”

“You did!” I cried, in astonishment.

“Yes. I've got an offer of five hundred dollars for your arrest. Just see how valuable somebody considers you!”

“Richard Livingstone!” I exclaimed, impulsively.

“That's the very identical individual that made the offer. He loves you, he does—much!” and the detective put his tongue in his cheek in a highly significant manner.

“My escape has been discovered, then—that is, I mean they do not think that I have been drowned!”

“No. When they backed the train to search for you, Timps—that's the name of the officer who had charge of you—hadn't recovered from the effects of that kick you gave him under the ear, and the other officer hadn't a very clear idea of what you looked like. So they left the train, and came back to the city. Timps went to Livingstone at once, and told him of your escape—the officer evidently had an idea that he was deeply interested in your fate. The whole party—Livingstone and the two officers—came piling down here at once. Livingstone offered me a reward of five hundred if I laid hands on you and sent you up to Sing Sing, where, between you and I and the bed-post, I think if you went, you'd sing small.”

“Of course I accepted the offer at once. I knew the best way to keep the detectives off your track was to put myself on it.”

“You're a friend indeed, Peters,” I cried, taking him by the hand warmly.

“In course!” he said, with a grin; “but I tell you, when Timps told me the particulars of your escape, I nearly died of laughter; and when he described how you gave him a ‘clout’ under the ear, I thought I should have died—ha! ha! ha!” and the detective roared at the idea. “He swears bloody vengeance against you; when you knocked him down, the fall smashed his pipe, and it cost him twenty-five dollars—a genuine imported article. He's raving about it, and swears he'll kill you if he ever gets hold of you.”

“I'm not much afraid!” I answered.

“That's right!” he said, with a hearty slap on the back. “But, joking aside, you are in great

danger. Livingstone has an idea that you will come to me; I could tell that by the way he talked. He's a deep ‘un, but he can't throw any dust in my eyes. I've seen rogues before I ever laid eyes on him.”

“Have you seen the report of my trial?”

“No; I had just got back from the West to-day—but Timps told me all about it.”

“Well, what do you think of it?” I asked.

“Just as I said before,” he answered; “this Livingstone is a deep ‘un; it was a nice little trap, and you walked into it. In fact, any man would have done the same. By the way, did you notice a man in the entry-way as you came in—a seedy-looking fellow, with a quill toothpick?”

“Yes, I saw him,” I answered; “but he was not in the doorway when I entered; he went into the street to see about a horse that fell down, and in his absence I slipped up.”

“That was smart!” he cried; “you've got a head on your shoulders. I'll back you to win against Richard Livingstone, though he has got the start. As you probably suspected, that fellow's a spy, put there to watch whether you would come to see me or not. Livingstone has an idea that I'm a friend of yours, and his visit to me was a blind to fool me, but I ain't fooled quite so easy as he thinks for. So after he had gone, I went quietly to the head of the stairs, and there I saw Mr. Man in the entry.”

“What is to be done?”

“Well, you must get out of New York; they'll make it too hot for you here. There's an emigrant train to-night at eight o'clock, over the Erie road, for the West; you must get off in that; your disguise will not be discovered by any officer that may happen to be over there. Besides, they won't think that you'll ‘light out’ so quick.”

“Where shall I go?” I asked.

“Oh, 'way out West anywhere—go into the Gold mines round Pike's Peak. Who knows? You may strike a ‘lead’ out there worth a fortune, and if you should be lucky, you can come home with your ‘ducat,’ and just make Livingstone ‘sick!’”

“But my ticket?”

“That's all right—draw on me for what you want; I ain't a rich man, but I can stand the press. I guess, and some day, why, you can square it off. By the way I've got an idea. Some Buffalo men put a case in my hands about a year ago, a fellow absconded with considerable plunder belonging to other parties; I turned it over to some Chicago parties, not being able to attend to it myself, and they made a botch of the whole affair—let the fellow slip through their fingers and get off to the mines. Then they wanted so much in advance before they would go on any further, and, as the Buffalo parties wouldn't pay anything until the fellow was caught, why, the whole thing fell to the ground, and the papers were returned to me. Now, you might take 'em, and work the case up. I think there's some money in it. You might frighten the rascal into a compromise anyway.”

“Well, I'll try it!” I said.

Peters took a bundle of papers from a drawer and gave them to me. I placed them in my pocket.

“How can I get out without this spy seeing me?” I asked.

“I'll go out first just as if I were going home, which I generally do about this time. Of course I'll see him outside and I'll get him into conversation, and take him off to get a drink; that will fix it. Now, here's two hundred dollars; I've just hauled in five hundred for a little scandal job up in Fifth avenue, and I'm flush. If you want any more just draw on me.”

The large-hearted detective forced the money into my hand! I accepted it, because I knew that some day, I could repay it.

“By the way,” he cried, suddenly, “there's a letter for you here,” he handed it over to me. I saw by the post-mark that it had been posted on the very day that I had been arrested for the forgery, over two weeks ago.

I opened it; it was from Nell, the Orange Girl; she knew of my connection with Peters, and had remembered it when she wrote. It read as follows:

“DEAR MR. GORDON:

“I am obliged to leave New York very suddenly. Poor girl as I am, I have enemies—powerful enemies. It is to avoid them that I fly. I am going to Buffalo. I have friends there, friends of my mother; they will protect me. I should dearly love to see you before I go, but every moment I remain in New York is a moment of danger. Please think of me sometimes, for I shall think of you a great deal. Only how I wish I could see you! Don't forget me, please.

(Signed)

“N. L.”
“P. S. A letter addressed to N. Orange, Buffalo, I shall be sure to get. Do you know any one who would like to write to me? I know some one that I wish would write, and if I should ever get a letter from him, I would treasure it so much.”

A thrill of joy went through my heart as I read the words penned by her dear hand. Write—if course I would, and gladly.

She signed the letter N. L.; what was her last name? I had never inquired; but what did it matter to me? So I thought then, but after events proved that it mattered a great deal.

Thus it is in this life—we walk blindly on, unconscious of the future.

With a farewell press of the hand, Peters went down the stairs. In about ten minutes I ventured to descend. Peters and the spy had departed. It had now grown quite dark. I went to the Erie Ferry at once, bought a ticket for Omaha, and entered the car.

In the car, I thought I would examine the papers Peters had given me. I did so, and to my utter astonishment, discovered that the fellow who had fled from Buffalo, and whom I was to hunt up, was none other than the Rev. Robert Browning, and the Rev. Robert Browning, was the man who, in the year 1843, at Buffalo, married Salome Percy to—Aul the clew was in my hands.

Richard Livingstone had cause for fear, for I was on the track again!

CHAPTER VIII.

"DEAD MAN'S GULCH."

In due time I arrived at Omaha, no incident worth mention occurring on the way.

During the journey I had fully examined the papers relating to the fugitive, Rev. Robert Browning. Browning, from the description, was something of a "black sheep;" he had managed to get into his hands some ten thousand dollars belonging to the society over which he had presided, and one fine morning he was missing. From the letters of the Chicago detectives, it appeared that the flat-footed Robert was a slippery customer. He had been arrested in Chicago, but in being conveyed to the "Armory"—the "Tombs" of the self-styled "New York of the West"—he had managed to elude the officers and escape. The Chicago detectives had traced him as far as Denver City, but at that point he had again given them the slip, and the supposition was that he had gone to the mountains to the mines; then the detectives had given up the job and returned to Chicago.

After considering these facts I came to the conclusion that the old-time task of finding a needle in a bundle of hay was more than matched in this job.

In one way only could I hope for success, and that was to stumble accidentally upon him. Luck then must aid me. So far, fortune had stood my friend; should the blind goddess but continue her favors, all would be well.

I stopped in Omaha only a few hours, and then pushed on via the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Overland coaches for Denver City, where I arrived in due time.

I had been in Denver about three days, deliberating which of the mines to try first—debating in regard to the respective claims to auriferous wealth put forth by "Gopher-town," "Catfish Bend," "Roaring Gulch," and a dozen other embryo cities—when a little incident occurred which determined my destination.

I went to my room at the hotel one night for the purpose of retiring, and had just removed my coat, when the door—which I had neglected to fasten—opened suddenly, and a stranger came in. I looked at him in astonishment. He was dressed in the rough style common to the Far West—a man below the medium size, but what he lacked in height was amply made up in breadth. Not that he was what could be called fat, but, to use the old expression, he was built from the ground upward. His dark-brown hair was cropped tight to his head, which was small and bullet-shaped; a pug-nose and square chin, combined with a general expression which said "fight," and you have the appearance of the stranger who had so unceremoniously walked into my apartment.

After he had entered, he leaned against the wall and surveyed the room with a look of extreme gravity.

I approached for the purpose of asking his business, when I suddenly became conscious of the fact that the man before me was under the influence of the celebrated whisky denominated "tanglefoot"; in other words, he was helplessly drunk.

Suddenly his legs gave way and he came gently to the floor; with a grunt of satisfaction he stretched himself out, and coolly and calmly went to sleep.

I let him alone. I had a fellow-feeling for him. I remembered how many nights I had lain in the mud-gutter.

"No," I said. "I'll not turn him out, I'll let the poor devil sleep off his drunk here."

So I took one of the pillows from the bed, and raising his head, gently, put it under it. A drunken grunt rewarded my efforts; then I undressed and went to bed.

Sleep did not come for some time. The blue eyes and sunny hair of Nell, the Orange Girl, were in my thoughts, and banished sleep from my eyes. Strange how much I thought of that girl. It was useless to deny the truth—I loved her! I knew it; I felt it in every thrill that passed through my heart whenever I thought of her. I had not been fully sensible of the truth until the caprices of fate separated us; but now I knew it. Was it possible, though, that we should ever come together? Would it ever be in my power to make her my wife? My wife!

Oh, what a world of happiness was in that word, coupled with her dear name!

But first, my vengeance! Macarthy's death must be avenged upon his assassin, Livingstone. That once accomplished, then for Nell and love eternal; and then I went to sleep.

The morning sun shining in through the window full upon my face awakened me. My first thought was of Nell; my second one of my drunken friend. There he was, still sound asleep upon the floor.

I proceeded to dress. Just as I was pulling on my boots, the stranger turned over, and with a snort, suddenly awoke.

"Whar the blazes am I?" was the first salutation, as he rubbed his eyes and gazed around with a bewildered air.

"Precisely where you laid down last night," I replied.

"Yes, stranger; but whar the mischief am I?" responded the unknown, blinking his eyes like an owl, trying to keep them open.

"Well, you are in Room Number 40, Central Hotel, Denver City."

"Look-a-here, stranger!" said the unknown, excitedly; "was I drunk last night?"

"Yes, I think you were," I answered.

"Jist as I thought!" said the stranger, with an air of deep disgust. "Drunk ag'in—drunk as a b'iled owl, by hookey! Hullo! how did this piller come under my head? Did I 'carbine' it from you, stranger? If I did, just 'scuse me, 'cos I've been b'isting benzine enough to run a small-sized grist-mill."

"Oh, my friend, you came in here last night a little bewildered, and laid down on the floor—"

"Bewildered! I was as drunk as an Injun at a 'big talk,'" he interrupted.

"Exactly; you laid down on the floor, and I put the pillow under your head to make you as comfortable as possible," I replied.

"Stranger, you're a hoss, you air! If you ain't, I don't want a cent! You've done me a good turn an' I ain't the man to forget it! My name's Joe Sparks, sometimes called the 'Spider,'"

"What! the pugilist?" I asked, for I had read in the papers of a pugilist called the "Spider," the hero of several desperate battles fought inside the "magic circle," as the magnates of the prize-ring delight to call it—said battles taking place in Montana.

"I'm the man, but I ain't no pug; I don't fight for a livin'," he said, modestly. "You see how it come. When I were up to the diggin's in Montana, thar were an Englishman thar—a feller that used to make fighting his business in the old country. Wal, he was a-blowin' round 'bout bein' the best man in the diggin's. Now, the boys couldn't stand bein' crowded over by a cussed Britisher, so they axed me to take the starch out o' him. Wal, I 'went for him,' an' I licked him. Then two or three more went for me, an' I licked them; but, I tell you, stranger, I didn't like the biz, an' I shook it. I'm a little better than a bulldog; besides, the old woman didn't like it. She lives out East, in New York, stranger, an' she felt better when I quit. But I got the name of the 'Spider,' 'cos they say I looked like one of the old English bruisers."

I felt quite a degree of respect for Mr. Joe Sparks after he had defined his position.

"What mought your name be, stranger?" he asked.

"Robert James," I answered, giving him the name which I had resolved to adopt to disguise my identity, because there was just the least chance in the world that my friend Livingstone might set the detectives on my track and attempt to hunt me down.

"From the East, I s'pose?" continued the "Spider": "after gold, likely, eh?"

"Yes, I am going to the mines," I replied.

"Whar are you going to locate? Pitched onto any ranch yit?"

"I haven't made up my mind," I said; "perhaps you can tell me of a likely spot to 'strike oil' in the shape of gold?"

"I kin, ef any man kin, you bet!" returned Mr. Joe Sparks, with a knowing wink. "Jist go to any of the mining-towns and start a whisky shop; it pays a heap sight better than diggin'."

"Well, that's a business that I don't exactly like. Can you tell me of some ranch—I adopted the border phrase—"that's not overcrowded, and where there's a chance for a man to make something?"

"You can bet your bottom dollar I kin, an' you'd rake the pile every time, you bet! Jist you sling your traps an' go to 'Dead Man's Gulch.'"

"Dead Man's Gulch!" I exclaimed, a little surprised at this strange title for a town, though I had no reason to be surprised at any name, however odd, where "Shirt-tail Bend" and "Red Dog City" were evidence of the taste of the inhabitants in bestowing titles on their local abiding-places.

"Jist so! I'm a sucker ef it ain't! It's the liveliest town for one only two months old that you ever did see," responded the "Spider."

"Only two months old?"

"Thar or tharabouts, stranger. It's a lively

place; got 'bout nigh onto a thousand people thar now; 'bout fifty saloons, ten hotels, two the-a-ters, an' they do tell me that they think 'bout building a church next year or so. Oh, it's a lively place! Ef it ain't, why, you can take the heels right off my boots."

"I do not doubt your word, my friend, in the least," I replied; "but why in the name of Heaven didn't they call it something else than 'Dead Man's Gulch'?"

"Wal, now, stranger, you've hit on the very identical hoss that can tell you all about it. 'cos, you see, I was the fu'st man to diskiver the ranch."

"You?" I responded, with some little astonishment.

"Fact! Ef it ain't, you can cut off my ears, grease my head, and swallow me whole," said the redoubtable "Spider," with a grin.

"I should like to hear all about it. Sit down and give me the story," I said, offering Mr. Joe Sparks a chair, which he accepted.

"Wal, you see, just about three months ago, there were a party of six on us out prospecting for gold on a south fork of the Platte River; we had bin out jist 'bout a week and nary sign of gold bad we struck. Our peck had 'bout giv'n out, an' there wasn't much show for game round; so we jist held a 'big talk' among ourselves an' concluded to take the back-track to Catfish City, whar we startec from. I guess we were nigh onto a hundred miles south by west from thar, an' right into the Injun country, though we hadn't seen nary trail of the red devils yit. So, arter our 'big talk,' we all shouldered our shooting-irons and struck out in different trails to see ef we couldn't scare up something fer supper, fer our peck, as I said afore, were gittin' low.

"Wal, I speck I tramped nigh onto five miles, due north, fore I raised hide nor hair. I'd got into a big gulch with a stream tumbling down through it, muddy as blazes, one of the head-waters of the Platte, I s'posed. Wal, jist as I struck this branch or creek, somethin' rustled in the bushes ahead. That air rustle was to me like the smell of a good dinner to a hungry man. I foched the old gun down from my shoulder quicker'n a wink, an' then I waited for an instant, first, to see whar to fire. Then thar was another rustle in the bushes ahead, an' I saw a small dark thing among the leaves that looked like a good-sized bird. I didn't know what in thunder it was, but thinks I to myself, 'Ef it's got fur or feather, I kin eat it,' for, 'twen you an' me, stranger, I were hungry enough to eat a crow; so I let drive. Bang went old shootin'-iron, an' I'm jiggered, stranger, ef out of them bushes thar didn't rise a cussed Injun, holding in his hand a piece of his skin leggin' that I'd sent my ball through. I see'd it in a minute. He'd come the old Injun dodge on me, and drawed my fire. Like a cussed fool, I had come out with nary other wepons 'cept my rifle an' a bowie.

"The Indian grinned, raised his rifle an' drew a bead on me. I tell you, stranger, I felt just like old Crockett's coon. 'Twa'n't any use to shoot; I were ready to come down. The Injun—he was a cussed Pluto, I knew from his paint an' toggery—motioned me to throw down my knife. I tell you, it went down lively. Then he p'inted down the creek an' nodded his head, as much as to say 'git,' an' I 'gitted.' Thar wa'n't any chance of a fair fight. I reckoned as how he had a party down the creek, an' he were a-goin' to drive me down to 'em. Stranger, I wouldn't have given an ounce of gold-dust for my life jist then. I stepped out tolerably lively, the darned Injun follarin' abhind, with his gun well up to give me a shot in case I tried a run.

"I thought the matter over in the first fifty steps. I were goin' to certain death anyway; might's well be shot outright as to be tickled to death by their cussed knives, an hour or two later. Ef I made a bold dash fur it, he'd fire at me; he mought miss, or only wound me slightly. It were worth tryin'. The gulch afore me for a couple of hundred feet was tolerably clear; so, with a big jump, I started. The Injun were astonished. He hollered something in his outlandish gibberish, an' then crack went his gun; whiz kim the bullet an' it plowed through my left side. I were hit, but I reckoned not bad. I stopped, an' wheeled round to meet Mr. Injun. He kin tearin' on an' made a lick at me with the butt-end of his gun. I dodged, an' whack went the stock ag'in a rock, splittin' off a piece of it, an' mashin' the gun like blazes. He dropped back a piece, and drew his knife. I picked up a rock—the piece he smashed off with his lick—an' right thar, right in the excitement of that air free fight, I saw it was quartz rock an' streaked with gold! I'd struck a 'lead,' dead sure! Here was gold, an' plenty of it. Of course the stream in the gulch, too, were filled with it. Ef I got out of this fight a live man—an' I wouldn't have bet my pile of rocks on it, 'cos it were shaky—here were the spondulicks fur the asking.

"The Injun kin at me, roaring like a boulder. I let drive with the rock an' knocked the knife out of his hand. That was luck, stranger. Then we clinched; Jack was as good as his master now. We had it lively fur a time, I

tell yer, fur the Injun were a tough cuss, an' he worked me all I knew how. We had it up and down, over an' under, mashin' each other's heads ag'in' the rocks. I got some ugly pokes, an' I give some ugly ones; but, finally, I got him down on the rocks, an' I got one arm free, an' then I lathered him. I felt that I were growing weak, an' either I must finish him or he'd finish me. At last I got hold of a rock an' I mashed him once or twice, an' then I fainted, fur you see, stranger, I had begun to bleed like a pig from the wound in my side.

"Wal, to finish my story: some of the boys heard the report of my gun, and then the Injun's, an', s'pectin' somethin' was up, they kim' ring up the gulch, found the Injun dead, an' me in a dead faint on top of him. They fotched me to, doctored up my wound—that were only a flesh wound after all—an' then we went fur the gold. Half the party went back to 'Catfish City' for provisions and tools. Wal, one of the darned fools got h'isting more benzine than he could carry, an' blabbed out 'bout our big strike; so, in course, in less than a month, 'Catfish City' kin pilin' in upon us; but we had made a big strike afore that. My share were about three thousand dollars. I sent a thousand home to the old woman in the East—"

"And the rest?" I inquired.

"Lost every blessed cent here in Denver, gambling," responded the "Spider," sheepishly.

"That was bad."

"It were bad—bad!" exclaimed Joe, emphatically. "I were a fool; they got me drunk, an' went fur me. But I'm going back to 'Dead Man's Gulch' right away. You see, they called the town that, 'cos they found me and the dead Injun thar; an' if you'd like to go partners with me, I'm your man, an' I ain't a bad cuss to travel with, 'cos, without blowing about it, thar ain't many of the roughs round these diggin's that care 'bout tackling the 'Spider.'"

"I'll go with you!" I said, at once.

"Shake!" cried he, extending his muscular, well-knit hand.

I complied with his request.

"Now let's p'ison ourselves!" he said, after the ceremony of shaking hands was completed.

"What?" I asked, not understanding him.

"Let's h'ist some benzine—take a drink—stranger. That's the way we nominate it hyer."

We adjourned at once to the saloon.

As well "Dead Man's Gulch" as any other mining-town for me. Being a new town, and the mines reported rich, of course all adventurers would naturally go there. Perhaps the rascal I was in search of—Browning—would be attracted there. At any rate, I must do something to make money, for without money I was powerless. Therefore every step I took toward the new Eldorado, the "lively" city known as "Dead Man's Gulch," in reality took me nearer to fortune—nearer to my revenge—nearer to Nell, the Orange Girl.

CHAPTER IX.

FOUR JACKS AND A BOWIE-KNIFE.

AFTER a tiresome journey, Joe Sparks, the "Spider," and your humble servant, "Robert James," late of New York City, rode into the "lively" town known as "Dead Man's Gulch."

We arrived about six in the evening. Joe was well acquainted with the town—if the miserable collection of small frame buildings that looked as if they had been thrown, not nailed together, and weather-beaten tents could be dignified by such a title. One thing struck me as being curious, and that was that every third shanty was a liquor saloon. I wondered how they all lived—in fact, put the question to Joe, knowing him to be well posted in the premises.

"Live! Blazes! I reckon they do, an' make heaps of money, too. Why, you see, arter dark a feller hasn't anywhar else to go 'cept to go an' h'ist some benzine somewhere. Arter supper I'll take you round an' show the sights."

"Show me the elephant, eh, as we say in New York?"

"Elephant! Blazes!" responded Joe, emphatically; "we ain't got no elephant hyer; it's a grizzly-b'ar, claws an' all."

We proceeded to a hotel kept by an intimate friend, as he assured me. It was a small two-story frame shanty, dignified by the title of "Metropolitan Hotel." The board was only three dollars per day—which Joe assured me was really dirt-cheap—and the food was awful, or, as Joe expressed it in his homely way, "the peck was tough!"

The landlord of the Metropolitan was a big, burly fellow, whom his guests familiarly addressed as Bill Jones.

Mr. Jones received us with a welcome that plainly showed that he held Mr. Joe Sparks in high esteem.

"Let's licker, gentlemen!" was about his first salutation.

I had already noticed that, in the mining-region, to be able to drink whisky well was an accomplishment held in high regard. Now, as I had entirely sworn off from the use of the dangerous fluid, it placed me in a peculiar predica-

ment, for to refuse to drink with a man in the Far West is almost the same as to offer him a direct insult; but in this dilemma I had happily compromised the matter by drinking ale—that, in my view of the subject, not containing spirits enough to violate my oath.

The ceremony of "liquoring" being over, Joe proceeded to inquire how matters and things were in and around Dead Man's Gulch.

"Lively, gentlemen, lively!" was Mr. Bill Jones's response.

Another peculiarity of the Far West—the frequent use of the term, "gentlemen;" and you can offer no greater insult to some rough, uncouth boor of a fellow than to tell him that he is "no gentleman;" that once spoken, look out for bowie-knives and revolvers—about the first "arguments" that these "gentlemen" resort to.

"Struck any new 'leads' lately?" asked Joe.

"Yes; quite a good one 'bout a week ago in 'Sucker Bend.' It pans out first-rate, an' they do say that it's the best strike yit," responded Mr. Jones.

"Who struck it?" asked Joe.

"A feller from Iowa, named Pete Brown—a nice, quiet sort of a chap. He got out nigh five thousand dollars' worth of stuff afore anybody got wind of it. Ye know the Bend's out of the way a little. Wal, in course the moment it was known, the other fellers piled right in onto him; but he'd staked out his claim all right, so he kinder had the best of it; so they formed a stock consarn, and bought out half his claim."

Here the landlord deposited a huge chew of tobacco in his capacious jaws.

"Brown has a good thing of it," I said; "is he working the claim now?"

"No; the poor cuss is dead," said the landlord, in a melancholy tone.

"Dead!" exclaimed both Joe and I.

"Yes; he's passed in his checks," said Jones

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"Wal, thar ain't anybody that knows exactly; that is, ef they do know, they don't say. He were found one morning on the road between here and Sucker Bend, stone-dead."

"Murdered?" I exclaimed.

"Wal, that's jist what we can't tell. Thar wasn't any mark of violence on the body—nary bullet-hole or knife-cut."

"Did he have any money with him?"

"Wal, he did. Ye see, he brought quite a pile up to town with him, an', arter he'd waked snakes round with the boys fur a spell and punished considerable benzine, he went into English Bob's gambling saloon an' played poker with Bob an' old Whitehead, an' they do say he won nigh onto five hundred dollars, so that he must have had a cool thousand with him," answered Jones.

"Did they find any money on the body?" I asked.

"Nary money!"

"Well, it is evident then that he was murdered for his gold."

"That's the p'int!" cried Jones, bringing his hands together with a hearty smack; "but, how the blazed they 'fixed' him without leaving any sign is what knocks us."

"Is anybody suspected?"

"Wal, some folks have an idea—folks will think, ye know—but a man don't like to say right out, 'cos we've got a heap of ugly customers hyer, an' they all hang together. I've my spicions, in course, but I ain't anxious to have them git at me. It would be a darned good thing fur the town to raise a Vigilance Committee hyer, an' clean some on 'em out."

The landlord lowered his voice as he spoke.

"Who is this old Whitehead that you spoke of?" I asked.

"Who is he?" responded Jones, with a look of disgust. "He's the darnedest skunk that ever lived; he's a fellow nigh onto sixty, with a head jist as white as snow, an' he's the biggest thieving gambler you ever did see. When he fu'st come to town—that were 'bout a month ago—he purtended to be dreadful pious, an' they do say he tried to git up a prayer-meeting one Sunday. Anyway, he's an awful critter at speechifying. But poopy soon be j'ined in with a set of roughs an' gamblers hyer, jist as natural as if he'd bin with them all his life."

Here was food for reflection. Might not this old Whitehead be the very man I was in search of—Browning, the runaway preacher? The landlord's description answered to the one that had been obtained of him in Buffalo; he was about sixty years of age, and his hair was white as snow.

"Any idea where he came from, Mr. Jones?"

"Wal, yes; from New York State, I heern tell. They say he used to be a preacher thar."

It was my man, sure! Now, then, if fortune but took my friend—if I could discover from him all the particulars of the marriage of Salome Percy and the birth of her child—enough proof to satisfy the law—I should win the game at last.

I proposed to Joe that, after supper, we should stroll down the street to the saloon of English Bob and see what was to be seen there. Joe assented to the proposition at once.

"Looka here, gentlemen," cried our worthy

host, "if you play keerds down thar, jist keep your eyes peeled, 'cos they're on the gouge from the word go; an' jist keep your we'pons handy, 'cos they're quick as lightning on the trig-ger."

"Jist so," said Joe, laconically. "I reckon they'd better not try any little game onto me, or I'll start a graveyard hyer on my own account."

Mr. Jones winked both eyes in a highly significant manner—suggested that a little "benzine" was good before supper, and remarked that he'd back Joe "ag'in" his weight in wild-cats; then we "p'isoned" ourselves and went in to supper.

Supper over, Joe and I started down the street. The saloons seemed to be full of people—rough, uncouth-looking fellows, but flush with money. English Bob's saloon was 'way down the street, pretty near the outskirts of the town.

The saloon was nothing but a one-story shanty. It was filled by a crowd of rough fellows, nearly all of them flushed with liquor. Gambling was going on with great vigor. In the center of the room a roulette-table was in full blast, surrounded by an anxious crowd who were betting their gold-dust freely.

Round went the wheel, spinning went the marble; see how anxious were the faces of some of the lookers-on, some of whom, perhaps, had all their fortune hazarded upon this uncertain chance.

"Ace wins, gentlemen!" shouted the presiding gambler.

"Cuss the luck!" cries a bearded miner, "thar goes the last of my pile!"

Then, with an oath, he pulled his broad-brimmed slouch over his eyes and sallied forth into the darkness.

"That feller's lost all his pile," whispered Joe to me; "it's ten to one he'll tackle somebody to-night 'cos he feels bad, an' ll either kill some one or git killed."

A group of four playing poker at a small side-table attracted my attention. Three of the four were rough-bearded men, with repulsive faces, that had a sort of hang-dog expression about them—faces that one would not dare to meet alone on a dark night. The fourth one was an old man, with hair as white as snow, said hair cut short and sticking out like bristles all over his head.

He was cleanly shaven, something of a rarity in the mining region, where full beards are all the fashion. His face was thin, the skin of a dirty yellow tinge that contrasted with the white hair; his nose was hooked like the beak of a bird of prey, and the sharp little gray eyes that peered forth from under his shaggy white eyebrows suited well with the rest of the face.

"That's my man," I said, to myself.

Then I called Joe's attention to the party.

"That big feller thar with the red hair and beard is English Bob. He's a bruiser, he is. They tried to git up a match between him and me onc't, up in Montana, but he come an'tuck a look at me, an' then he backed out of the job," said Joe.

"Why, he's bigger than you are, Joe," I said.

"It tain't a man's size that tells so much in a fight as how hard he kin hit an' how plucky he is. When I war on the fight, I warn't afraid of any man in the diggin's, big or little. I don't know but as how I liked one of these big, clumsy chaps best, 'cos I'm spry as a cat, an' could lick 'em all to pieces afore they could git in a blow at me at all."

"Then you didn't make a match with him?"

"No, cuss him! I'd have liked to, 'cos he did some putty tall talking round 'bout how he could handle me."

And the "Spider's" eyes snapped as he looked at English Bob, and mentally took his measure.

"Do you know that old man with the white hair?" I asked.

"Nary know!" responded Joe; "he looks like a deep old cuss. Say, kin you play poker?"

"Yes, some," I said.

"Wal, I can't; that is, I can't play well enough for them chaps. Kin you cheat?"

"Cheat?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Yes, 'cos that's the game they play here. Kin you tell when they try to cheat you, an' kin you cheat back ag'in?"

"Yes; there's not many professional gamblers that can handle a pack of cards better than I can; but, what do you want to know that for?"

"Cos I want you to play poker with them chaps an' lather 'em, an' ef you find they cheat better nor you can, jist you catch 'em right at it, seize the pile, give me the wink, an' ef they show fight I'll climb on their eyebrows lively."

"But, suppose they draw pistols or knives?"

"Draw blazes! I'll have the first lick in this fight, an' let me give one on 'em a hot 'un under the ear, an' they won't draw no we'pons, not jist yet."

And the Spider's hard hands closed convulsively at the idea.

"Hold on, Joe; don't be in a hurry," I said. "Count the cost first. Is it safe to tackle this fellow right here in his own saloon? He may have a lot of roughs to assist him."

"That's all hunky," responded Joe, with a wink. "There's 'bout a dozen of my pals hyer; didn't you see me nod to that table-full of chaps over thar? They'll back me, tooth an' nail, hide an' ha'r. Jist you go in. Hyer's five hundred that I borrowed from Jones on my claim. Go the hull pile ef you git a chance."

"All right! I'm your man!" I cried.

I took the money, shoved it into my pocket, and approached the table. The game they had been playing had just come to an end. One of the miners having "lost his pile"—that is, lost all he had—rose from the table and lounged over toward the bar, which was at the further end of the saloon. I instantly took his place.

"Good-evening, gentlemen! I should like to join in the game, if you haven't any objection," I said.

I noticed a glance of satisfaction exchanged between English Bob and the white-headed old man.

"Certainly, sir," responded the old man, in a clear, courtly voice, a relic of the civilization he had left behind him; "from the East, I presume?"

"Yes," I said.

"What State?" he asked.

"Buffalo, New York."

The old man started; I began to think that fortune had again befriended me, and that the fickle goddess had thrown right in my path the very man I was in search of.

"From Buffalo, eh?" said the old gambler, with a vain effort to conceal his agitation. "What might I call your name?"

"Anson Livingstone."

Again the old man started; a puzzled look appeared upon his face as he looked curiously into mine.

"I knew one Anson Livingstone about twenty years ago. He was a native of New York City—"

"Yes, and he was married in Buffalo in 1843," I said, quietly, interrupting him in his speech.

"Ye—ye—yes!" he stammered, in utter bewilderment.

Fortune had indeed favored me; this was Browning, and no mistake!

"That Anson was a distant relation of mine," I said, in explanation.

"Yes, I supposed so," said the old man, but I could plainly see from his manner that my explanation did not satisfy him.

He evidently looked upon me in the light of an enemy, or, if not an enemy, one that might become one.

"Come, gents," said English Bob, in a hoarse tone that reminded one of the croak of a bull-frog, "let's begin; life is short, an' we kin not afford to waste any onto it."

Bob shuffled the "papers," we cut for deal, which fell to him, and we commenced to play. Joe had taken up a position behind my chair. I noticed that English Bob looked at him every now and then in a manner that boded him no good.

The game went on. We played at first for small amounts only. I soon discovered that the worthy "gentlemen" with whom I had the honor of playing were not only sad cheats, but bungling ones. Another simple fact, and that was that they were all in partnership against me.

That didn't trouble me much, for I could handle the cards much better than they; so, whenever they "put a job" and "packed" the cards for me, I generally spoiled it by a skillful "cut." At the end of about two hours I was about five hundred dollars ahead on the game.

My worthy friends began to get agitated; their money was about gone. Bob, with an oath, called to his barkeeper to bring another thousand. The barkeeper—a stout young rough—brought the gold-dust done up carefully in little bags, duly stamped, and placed himself behind Bob's chair. I suspected some foul play by this, especially when Bob and the barkeeper held a whispered consultation together.

"Look out fur squalls!" said Joe warningly in my ear.

I bent over the table to take up my cards, and at the same time threw my coat open by a careless motion so I could easily get at my bowie.

It was my deal, so I "fixed" the pack for Mr. Bob. He cut them without disturbing my arrangements in the least, and I dealt off the hands. To myself I gave four jacks and a king; to English Bob three kings, a nine and an ace; to the others a small pair apiece. I calculated that Bob would go in heavy on his hand, which was a tolerably strong one, but which mine would beat and take the pile. It was diamond cut diamond.

As I anticipated, Bob went in strong; the others "passed," and the game lay between him and myself. Up planked we the gold-dust, until at last Bob put up the last of his thousand. I could not understand his going in quite so rashly, for his hand could be beat, and that he knew as well as I. So I made up my mind that there was some trick in the background. However, I covered his money and "called" him. He grinned for a moment, deliberately dropped his cards down upon the floor, and then stooped to pick them up.

The barkeeper stooped at the same time, as if to assist him. I saw the signs at once; the barkeeper had another hand ready, and would change cards with him. My guess was correct, for Mr. Bob, with a grin, laid down on the table four aces and a jack.

"Take this pile!" he cried.

"Not quite!" I exclaimed. "I can beat that!"

"You kin! With what?" he asked, contemptuously.

"An Arkansas hand—four jacks and a bowie-knife!" I cried, throwing down my cards and whipping out my bowie-knife, at the same time clutching the gold-dust.

Bob made a movement as if to draw a weapon, when Joe, who had observed the motion, struck him a terrific blow between the eyes which knocked him into the crowd senseless. In another second a free fight was in full operation. Joe and I, however, had too many friends, and in about ten minutes we cleaned out all the roughs. Bob was carried off by some of his friends.

In the fight the white-headed old man had received a blow on the head which had rendered him insensible. Joe got a couple of his friends to carry the old man up to Jones's hotel at my suggestion. I felt sure that it was Browning, the minister who had married Salome Percy to—Well, of that hereafter.

The clew was in my hands now; I must be blind indeed if I could not unravel the tangled skein of guilt.

CHAPTER X.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

THE MINERS CARRIED THE OLD MAN KNOWN AS "WHITEHEAD," BUT WHO I FELT SURE WAS BROWNING, INTO JONES'S HOTEL, AND PLACED HIM ON THE BED IN THE ROOM ASSIGNED TO JOE AND MYSELF.

THE OLD MAN WAS STILL INSENSIBLE, AND JONES, WHO EXAMINED THE WOUND ON HIS HEAD, DECLARED IT TO BE, IN HIS OPINION, A VERY DANGEROUS ONE, AND ADVISED THAT A DOCTOR HE SENT FOR AT ONCE.

"IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THERE IS A DOCTOR NEAR AT HAND?" I INQUIRED.

"SART'IN," RESPONDED JONES; "DOCTOR SMITH; HE'S A HULL TEAM; HEAPS OF PRACTICE, TOO, 'SPECIAL-ARTER WE'D HAD A LITTLE DIFFICULTY HYER AN' SHOT HALF A DOZEN OR SO, JIST FUR FUN."

"WILL SOME ONE GO FOR HIM?" I ASKED.

"I'M YOUR MAN, BOSS!" CRIED A STALWART SPECIMEN OF HUMANITY, WHO HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY DISTINGUISHED IN THE PREVIOUS MELEE, USING A HEAVY ARM-CHAIR AS A WEAPON WITH GREAT SUCCESS UPON THE HEADS OF HIS OPPONENTS, AND AWAY HE STARTED.

I TURNED MY ATTENTION TO THE WOUNDED MAN. AT JONES'S SUGGESTION, THE ROOM WAS CLEARED, JOE AND I ALONE REMAINING. THE REST ACCEPTED THE CORDIAL INVITATION OF MR. JONES TO "LICKER" DOWN-STAIRS.

I BATHED THE OLD MAN'S HEAD WITH WATER, AND APPLIED A WET TOWEL TO HIS TEMPLES. THIS HAD THE DESIRED EFFECT, FOR IN A FEW MINUTES HE OPENED HIS EYES.

"WHERE AM I?" HE ASKED, IN A SEEABLE VOICE.

"YOU'RE AMONG FRIENDS, SIR," I REPLIED.

"THAT'S SO!" CRIED JOE. "YOU GOT AN UGLY LICK ONTO YOUR HEAD DOWN YONDER, AN' AS THE CROWD YOU WERE HANGIN' ONTO BOILED WITHOUT LOOKIN' ARTER YOU, WE TOOK CARE ON YOU, THOUGH I DO THINK YOU'RE A PISON OLD CASS."

"MY HEAD FEELS VERY BAD," HE SAID, FAINTLY. "I WONDER IF I AM GOING TO DIE! BUT I'M NOT FIT TO DIE; I'VE MUCH TO DO, MUCH TO SAY, AND—"

HERE HE PAUSED, HAPPENING TO LOOK UP IN MY FACE.

"YOU SAID YOUR NAME WAS LIVINGSTONE—BUT IT ISN'T; YOU LIED TO ME!"

"YOU ARE RIGHT," I REPLIED; "QUITE RIGHT, MR. BROWNING."

"AH! YOU KNOW MY NAME?" AND HE LOOKED UP EAGERLY IN MY FACE AS HE SPOKE.

"YES!" I ANSWERED.

"ARE YOU A DETECTIVE IN SEARCH OF ME?" HE GASPED.

"I AM A DETECTIVE AND IN SEARCH OF YOU," I ANSWERED, "BUT NOT FOR THE PURPOSE WHICH YOU IMAGINE. I AM ACTING IN BEHALF OF THE CHILD OF SALOME PERCY."

"SALOME PERCY," MUTTERED THE OLD MAN, THOUGHTFULLY. "YES, I REMEMBER: THE GIRL FROM LITTLE FALLS THAT I MARRIED IN BUFFALO TO THE NEW YORKER. AH! IT WAS A FOOLISH MARRIAGE FOR HER, POOR CHILD."

"VERY TRUE; AND THE CHILD OF THAT MARRIAGE—"

"YES, YES! I KNOW; CALLED SALOME, LIKE HER MOTHER," INTERRUPTED THE OLD MAN.

"EXACTLY," I REPLIED; "THAT GIRL NOW SUFFERS, BECAUSE THERE IS NO PROOF OF HER MOTHER'S MARRIAGE."

"NO PROOF!" CRIED THE OLD MINISTER, SUDDENLY; "YES THERE IS, PLenty OF PROOF; THE MARRIAGE-CERTIFICATE, THE WITNESSES—all ARE IN BUFFALO; ALL THE WITNESSES ARE LIVING—I KNOW WHERE THEY ARE."

"WILL YOU GIVE ME THE INFORMATION SO THAT I CAN FIND THESE PROOF'S?" I ASKED, EAGERLY.

"GIVE! HE! HE!" AND THE OLD MAN LAUGHED, A CRACKED, BROKEN LAUGH. "GIVE! NO ONE EVER GAVE ME ANYTHING! I'LL SELL IT, THOUGH."

IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE WRETCH WAS RECOVER-

ING. IN HIS HELPLESS CONDITION I SHOULD HAVE FELT RELUCTANT TO USE THE POWER I HAD TO FORCE HIM TO COMPLY WITH MY WISHES, BUT NOW AS IT WAS EVIDENT THAT HE MEANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE KNOWLEDGE HE POSSESSED, AND WAS NOT DISPOSED TO AID THE ORPHAN GIRL TO GAIN HER RIGHTS, UNLESS HE WAS WELL PAID, I DETERMINED TO SHOW HIM THAT HE WAS ENTIRELY AT MY MERCY.

"YOU WILL NOT GIVE ME THIS INFORMATION, THEN, UNLESS I PAY YOU FOR IT!"

"NO!" CAME DRYLY FROM HIS LIPS.

"AH, YOU THINK SO!"

"I KNOW SO," WAS HIS ANSWER.

"HE'S A PISON SKUNK!" MUTTERED JOE, IN A NOT VERY LOW TONE. "HERE YOU'VE 'BOUT SAVED HIS LIFE, AN' NOW HE WANTS TO GO BACK ON YER. HE'S PISON NOW, SURE!"

THE OLD MAN PAID NO MORE ATTENTION TO JOE'S WORDS THAN IF HE HADN'T SPOKEN.

"BROWNING—that's YOUR NAME, ISN'T IT? ROBERT BROWNING?" I SAID, QUIETLY.

"YES," HE ANSWERED, SULKILY; "WHAT OF IT?"

"WELL, NOT MUCH; ONLY I ARREST YOU."

"WHAT?" HE CRIED, WITH A START. "ARREST ME!"

"EMBEZZLEMENT AND FORGERY!"

THE OLD MAN SUNK BACK ON THE BED, FROM WHICH HE HAD PARTLY RISEN, WITH A GROAN.

"THAT WERE A STUNNER!" SAID JOE, LOOKING ON WITH AN AIR OF GREAT SATISFACTION; "TIME!"

BUT MR. BROWNING SHOWED NO DISPOSITION TO COME TO "TIME," AS JOE SUGGESTED. HE WAS PERFECTLY SATISFIED WITH THE "ROUND" HE HAD ALREADY GONE THROUGH.

"ARE YOU SPEAKING TRUTH?" ASKED BROWNING, IN A LOW, FAINT VOICE. "HAVE YOU REALLY A WARRANT FOR MY ARREST?"

"YES," I ANSWERED; "YOU'RE WANTED IN BUFFALO."

"BLAZES! I SHOULDN'T THINK ANYBODY WOULD WANT SUCH A TINNIN' OLD CASS AS HE IS ANYWHERE. I WOULDN'T HAVE HIS BIDE FOR A GIFT, NOHOW YOU COULD FIX IT," SAID JOE, IN DEEP DISGUST.

"AND IF I TELL YOU ALL I KNOW ABOUT THE AFFAIR YOU SPOKE OF, WILL YOU LET ME ALONE? FOR I HAVEN'T A DOLLAR LEFT OF THE MONEY I RAN AWAY WITH, AND IT WILL DO YOU NO GOOD TO TAKE ME BACK."

IT WAS PLAIN THAT THE OLD MAN WAS IN EARNEST. I CARED NOTHING FOR THE BUFFALO PARTIES; besides, as the old man said, without I could recover the money, what was the use of dragging him back? NO, THE INFORMATION, TO USE AGAINST LIVINGSTONE, WAS ALL I WANTED.

"I GIVE YOU MY HAND AND WORD I WILL NOT PRESS THE CHARGE AGAINST YOU, IF YOU WILL GIVE ME THE FULL PARTICULARS REGARDING THE MARRIAGE OF SALOME PERCY, THE BIRTH OF HER CHILD, AND THE MAN SHE MARRIED."

I SAID THIS TO PUT THE OLD MAN COMPLETELY AT HIS CASE.

"VERY WELL, THEN," HE SAID; "I ASK FOR NOTHING MORE. I WILL TELL YOU ALL I KNOW CONCERNING THE AFFAIR; BUT MY HEAD FEELS STRANGE. OH! SUCH A PAIN AS I HAVE IN MY TEMPLES!"

JUST AT THIS MOMENT IN BUSTLED JONES AND THE DOCTOR, WHO WAS A LITTLE, WITHERED-UP MAN, WITH A SHARP FACE AND LITTLE ROUND EYES.

"GOOD EVENING, GENTS. BEEN HAVING A LITTLE DIFFICULTY, EH?" AND THE DOCTOR COMMENCED TO EXAMINE THE HEAD OF THE OLD MAN, FIRST CLIPPING THE HAIR AWAY FROM THE WOUND WITH A PAIR OF SMALL SCISSORS.

I NOTICED THAT THE DOCTOR'S FACE GREW GRAVE AS HE LOOKED AT THE WOUND—which was indeed an ugly one—and felt the pulse of his patient.

AFTER A FEW MOMENTS OF SILENT EXAMINATION, THE DOCTOR LEFT THE BEDSIDE, AND DREW ME INTO A CORNER OF THE ROOM.

"A FRIEND OF YOURS?" HE SAID, INQUIRINGLY.

"WELL, YES," I ANSWERED, AFTER A MOMENT'S HESITATION.

"HE WON'T LIVE OVER FIVE HOURS, SIR; MAY KICK THE BUCKET IN ONE; THE BLOW WAS A VERY HEAVY ONE. IF HE WAS A YOUNG MAN, AN OPERATION MIGHT BE PERFORMED AND HE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH IT, BUT HE IS SO OLD; HE'S A GONE CASE; FIVE DOLLARS," AND THE DOCTOR CONCLUDED HIS PITHY REMARKS AND HELD OUT HIS HAND.

I PAID THE FIVE DOLLARS, MUCH TO JOE'S DISGUST.

"SAY! YOU DON'T MAKE MONEY EASY, DO YER?" WAS THE "SPIDER'S" REMARK, ADDRESSED TO THE DOCTOR, WHO ONLY GRINNED AT THE SPEECH AND POCKETED HIS FIVE DOLLARS.

"SAY!" CONTINUED JOE, "EF I EVER GIT MY HEAD MASHERED, DON'T YOU COME WITHIN TEN FOOT OF ME OR I'LL GIT RIGHT OFF THE BED AN' SWALLOW YER HULL!"

THE DOCTOR RETIRED PRECIPITATELY.

"HE'S CHAIN-LIGHTNING, HE IS!" SAID MR. JONES, REFERRING TO THE DEPARTING DOCTOR; "F'UST-RATE FELLER; MAKES A LITTLE MISTAKE SOMETIMES, THEY DO SAY, FOR I HEAR TELL THAT UP-COUNTRY A FELLER GOT HIS LEG MASHERED, AN' THEY CALLED THE DOCTOR IN, AN' IN A HURRY BE SAWED OFF THE WRONG LEG—HAL HAL!" AND THE WORTHY MR. JONES ROARED AT THE IDEA.

"DID THE WOUNDED MAN FEEL BAD?"

"WAL, HE DID SOME, BUT THE DOCTOR DID THE SQUAR' THING; HE BOUGHT HIM A WOODEN LEG AN' STOOD THE LICKER FOR THE CROWD."

AND MR. JONES TOOK HIMSELF OFF TO ATTEND UPON HIS GUESTS BELOW.

I RETURNED TO THE BEDSIDE OF THE DYING MAN.

"AM I GOING TO DIE?" HE SAID, SUDDENLY.

I WAS ASTONISHED AT THE QUESTION, BUT, BEFORE I COULD THINK OF AN ANSWER, HE SPOKE AGAIN:

"I heard what the doctor said; the ears of the dying are sometimes wonderfully quick. Within the last ten minutes I have been thinking over my past life. If I had only been placed differently in the world, and the temptations around me had not been so strong, and I not so weak, I might have led a different life. Ah!" here the old man heaved a deep sigh; "the snake is a snake, whether born in a wood or in captivity. It was my fate to do wrong. Now, as the last act of my life, I will do a little good. You are a friend to the child of Salome Percy?"

"Yes," I answered.

"You will see that she has her rights, if I place the proofs in your hands by which she may obtain them?"

"Yes; that is my solemn duty."

"That is all I ask. Listen, for my story must be short; I feel that I am growing fainter."

I brought a chair to the bedside and sat down in it to listen to the story of the dying man.

"In the year 1843" he began, "I was a regularly-ordained minister in the city of Buffalo, State of New York. One day a gentleman called to see me; he was quite a young man, with light curly hair and dark blue eyes—eyes that shone as though they were made of polished metal. This man was a New Yorker—a scion of one of the oldest New York families. His business with me was of a peculiar nature; he desired me to marry him that night to a young girl, by name Salome Percy. The marriage was to be a secret one, unknown to his folks and hers. At first I refused, but the offer of one hundred dollars—money was no object to him—won me to consent. I was poor and weak in honesty; the temptation came, and I yielded. That night I united in marriage Anson Livingstone, of New York City, to Salome Percy, of Little Falls."

"This was in '43?" I said, taking notes.

"Yes; the witnesses to the marriage were Stephen Quirk, my servant, and the grocer who kept in the store below, my name James R. Watson. Both of these men are now living in Buffalo, and can testify regarding this marriage, if necessary."

"Then the marriage can be proved beyond the shadow of a doubt?" I asked.

"Yes. I have the marriage-certificate; but of that I will speak in a little while. Anson Livingstone paid me the hundred dollars, and he and his wife departed. About ten months afterward, I happened to pick up a New York paper, and in it I read a full account of the marriage of Anson Livingstone and Clara Brevoort. I was thunderstruck; my first thought was that Salome, his first wife, had died; but two days after I was surprised by a visit from Salome Livingstone in person. I, of course, give her her husband's name. She was in great distress. She told me that, ever since her marriage, ten months before, she had lived in Buffalo, her husband being with her part of the time; the rest he spent in New York. They lived happily together, until Anson's father, old Livingstone, happened to discover, from one of his son's friends who was in his confidence, that his son was married. This discovery put the old man in a terrible rage, as he had arranged a match for his son with Clara Brevoort, daughter and heiress of William Brevoort, who was then one of the merchant princes of the great metropolis, and closely connected in business relations with Livingstone. Old Livingstone was a man of few words, but of many deeds; he called his son to him and asked the truth of what he had heard. Anson did not deny his marriage, but confronted his father and braved him. This enraged the old man still more; he said but little, but that little was terrible. He told his son that he had arranged a marriage for him with Clara Brevoort, and that, if he did not marry her, he would cast him upon the world without a shilling. And, not only that, he would use all his influence, all his money, to crush both him and his wife. But if he would marry Miss Brevoort, why, he could easily keep his Buffalo wife in ignorance. In fact, coolly proposed that his son should commit bigamy. The son for an instant reflected, and then—consented. The loss of wealth he could not bear; he loved his wife, but he loved gold better; besides, like a great many men, his love for the young girl who had left home and friends, all for him, was not so strong now as in the first few months of married life.

"The Livingstones are a family whose hearts are iron; the steel-blue eye is a true index to their natures—cold and selfish. True to his race, Anson Livingstone came to his young wife, and, acting on her love for him—a wild, passionate love, that worshiped him as its god—he won from her a promise that she would never disturb him in his second marriage. He told her all; only he represented that his father, for a pretended forgery, had power to send him to prison if he refused. She, poor, weak child, knowing but little of the world, believing fully in his word and in his honor, and trembling for his safety, gave the required promise. He went back to New York and was married. Of course I did not know these facts then, and did not learn them until, years afterward, Salome Livingstone, on her death-bed, told me all.

"Her motive for seeking me now was that in a few weeks she would become a mother. She came to me, the minister who had married her, to have sought a father's aid. For as she would, I did a good action. I aided once in my life. Her friends in Little Falls, the friendless girls, now that she was married, of course, did not tell the truth—which of course she must either keep secret—or else expose herself to terrible suspicion. She did not pose herself to terrible suspicion, keeping her marriage concealed.

"The plan I formed was this: I was slightly acquainted with George Wilson, her uncle, at Little Falls. I went to him, told of the marriage of his niece with Anson Livingstone—cousin of the Anson Livingstone of New York—represented that her husband had been called away to Europe on business, and was not expected to return for some time; requested that Salome might be allowed to come and stop with him until her husband's return. The honest old farmer consented at once, and at Little Falls, in the year 1844, Salome Livingstone gave birth to a female child, which, at my suggestion, was named Salome, after the mother."

Here the old man grew quite faint. I bathed his temples with water, and gave him some whisky from Joe's flask.

"I was present at the birth of her child, as was also George Wilson and his wife," he continued. "Salome Livingstone died one year ago, only a few months before her husband, Anson. His wife—in the eyes of the world, Clara—died two months after Anson's death. On her death-bed, Salome related all these particulars to me, and implored me to go to New York and demand justice from David Livingstone for his child, Salome. She gave me her marriage-certificate, and made me promise to protect her child. I gave that promise; but, just as I was preparing to go to New York, to see Livingstone, the ten thousand dollars raised by my society, for various purposes, were placed in my hands. The temptation was too great to be resisted, and I fled with the money and left the orphan child to the cold mercy of the world."

"How can I find her? and this marriage-certificate, where is it?" I asked.

"Find James R. Watson, of Buffalo, who formerly kept a grocery store there; he will give you the papers. He lives somewhere in the suburbs of the town. I intrusted the papers to him when I ran away. I intended some time, if possible, to go back and do something for the orphan; but I'm a wicked man, I fear to die, yet I am nearing the great mystery fast. In the midst of life—death!" he cried, suddenly, his mind evidently wandering. "What is it? 'To die, to sleep.' Oh! I'm very tired!"

He turned restlessly on his side; a faint groan came from his lips, and the erring minister lay dead before us. His spirit had fled to meet that Great Judge, who reads all human hearts and receives alike the saint and sinner.

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

As the dead minister had no relatives or friends near at hand excepting the gambling crew of English Bob, Jones, the landlord, and myself attended the burial.

The evening after the funeral Joe and I sat in our room deliberating. I had explained to Joe my reasons for possessing myself of the information pertaining to the child of Salome Percy, and also told him of the enmity existing between young Livingstone, the son of Anson, and myself.

"You see," I said, "that this girl, Salome, who was born at Little Falls, in the year 1844, and is therefore now about twenty-five years of age, is the legal heir of Anson Livingstone, deceased, but his property is now held and enjoyed by Richard Livingstone, his son by his second wife, Clara; you see, the moment I prove the legality of Anson's first marriage and the birth of this child Salome, of course she comes in for the property instead of Richard."

"Jist so; she's been making a waitin'—ace onto it, but jist as soon as you git these documents into your hands you'll loose her head an' she goes in an' wins in a cinter!" exclaimed Joe.

"Well, not exactly," I said.

I then related the interview between myself and Richard, when he produced the draft of his father's will—that will that gave fifty thousand dollars to Salome, his eldest child, and fifty thousand apiece to Richard and Olive, his children by his second marriage.

"But, ye didn't see the will, did ye?" asked Joe.

"No, only the draft of it; but it was in the handwriting of Anson Livingstone; I can swear to it, for I know his hand well."

"Jist so; I don't know much 'bout wills an' such like. Ef it were a hoss-race, or a sluggin'-match, why, I'm a hunk boy on all them things; but when one on them rich cusses makes a will, what does he generally do with it?"

I could not exactly see what Joe was trying

at, but, thinking that he had some object in view, I answered his question.

"The will is generally left for safe-keeping with the lawyer who draws it out, and then again, sometimes the person making the will puts it among his private papers."

"Then, ef a lawyer had this will, the moment the old cuss kicked the bucket the lawyer would have forked it over, an' it would ha' been made public, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," I answered, unable as yet to discern the object of these questions.

"An' nary will, 'cept the draft shown you, has bin heard on?"

"No."

"An' ef the old cuss kept the will himself, why, this son o' his, Richard, would ha' got his claws onto it!"

"Yes," I responded, "that is probable."

"Then, ef he put this air will into the fire, no one'll ha' been the wiser fur it."

"That is true; if the old man had drawn up his will bin self, which it is very likely he did, the witnesses, were probably the servants in the house, who of course would not think to say anything about the non-appearance of the document."

"I don't believe any such paper exists!" cried Joe, emphatically.

"Why not?" I asked, for, truth to say, I did not believe it existed, either; but still, I had no reasons for my belief—nothing but the bare suspicion.

"Why, by the game this pison cuss, Livingstone is playing. Ef he had the will, why, he'd ha' showed it to you, 'stead of t'other one, 'cause it was his little game to bluff you all he could. An', too, why wa'n't it probated, as the lawyers call it?"

I could not refrain from an expression of assent to Joe's remarks.

"It's jist as clear as old rye whisky!" he cried, triumphantly; "he hain't got it! All you've got to do is to find this air child, an' back her up with them documents that old Whitehead spoke of, an' you can clean this cuss out of every dollar he's got."

"What you say seems to me pretty near the truth. I don't think the old man destroyed the will, if he made one, but Richard may have done so, though his wisest course would have been to have preserved it. Still, I suppose he thought the first marriage of his father could not be proved, or the child of that marriage, Salome, the heir, might be dead. All these things might lead him to destroy the important document; but, in all these cases it was his best policy not to have destroyed it, but to have held it back."

"Jist so; but we don't always do what's best in this air world," said Joe, sagely.

"That's very true," I replied. "Now for the plan of operation. Just as soon as I make money enough, I'm going East to Buffalo for those papers, and once they are in my hands—"

"You'll make Mister Livingstone pretty sick, eh?"

And Joe indulged in a loud chuckle.

"But, I say," he continued, "you said I. Don't you count me in, too? You ain't a-goin' to go back on yer pal, are yer? 'cos ef yer say the word, I'm with yer tooth a' nail, as the painter said when he went fur the hog."

"All right, Joel!" I cried, taking his hand. "We'll fight the good fight together."

"Jist so, pard," he replied; "now fur operations. "We've got fifteen hundred dollars to commence onto—that air monev you won last night—an' I've got a claim up here on Gopher creek that's worth nigh onto five thousand, an' of the dirt is panning out well, an' the vein continues, I might git eight thousand fur it. You see, I own one-sixth of the original 'striation' hyer. Wal, now, my idee is this: we'll go right to work to criss-cross that air claim, an' as soon as we can realize bout twenty thousand, we'll go East an' put Mister Livingstone through. How's that, pard?"

"Square!" I replied, using the mining expression.

"Honest Injun," returned Joe, with a hearty clasp of the hand.

It was now getting late. I looked at my watch; it was a little past eleven. Joe and I had his intention of turning in, and immediately proceeded to do so. I sat down to write to Nellie at Buffalo. I had written her a few lines from Denver City, but, as I was uncertain then as to where I should go, I directed her not to answer, but wait until she should hear from me again.

Now that I was certain of remaining in Dead Man's Gulch, I was desirous of hearing from her; so I wrote quite at length. I told her that my prospects were good, and I hoped to return East within a year at the most; and I finally finished with an assurance that I thought of her more and more every day, and that I did not know how well I liked her until fate had separated us.

I knew very well that her keen woman's eye would discern more than the written page expressed. Leave a woman alone for finding out when a man loves her! A subtle instinct in their natures always detects the truth. A care-

less word, spoken perhaps without thought—a flash of the tell-tale eye, unseen by all, except the one—a smile that lights up the face at the approach of the loved object—all these trifles, light in themselves, yet are proofs “strong as holy writ” to the girlish heart that the love she seeks for is given.

I did not fear but that Nellie would guess my meaning.

My letter finished, I sealed it up and prepared to retire. First I turned the key in the lock of the door. There was need of precaution, for we were in a rough country, and of course it was known all over town that we had won considerable money the night before; and, as there was no place to deposit said money, why, of course, we must carry it on our persons. Many a man has been murdered in the mining-regions for a few ounces of gold-dust. Protection in the Far West lies in revolvers and bowie-knives and not in the strong hand of the law.

Our money I carried in a belt around my waist, and we slept with revolvers under our pillows. Just before blowing out the candle I looked out of the window. The night was very dark, and the street was quite silent—a silence, however, broken now and then by the drunken whoop and hallo of some fellow staggering to his shanty.

Out went the candle, and in I went into bed. I lay quiet perhaps half an hour, but no sleep came. In vain I closed my eyes; slumber would not seal them. Something—what it was I could not tell—impressed me with a feeling of uneasiness. In the stillness of the night the ticking of the watch under my pillow seemed to reverberate through the room as loud as one of the old-fashioned German clocks. In vain I turned from side to side. I could not sleep. Then a sensation of coming danger began to make itself felt in my mind. What was it that gave me this feeling? I answered, because I could not go to sleep and my watch ticked loudly. Not very strong grounds for apprehension, surely!

Then my thoughts wandered to Nellie, the strange girl who held my heart tangled up in the meshes of her sunny hair. Would she ever be mine? Oh! that it might be! and, as her face with the steel-blue eyes, the fair, pearly skin, and the strange-hued hair—that in the sun-light rippled like threads of gold—rose before me in the darkness, the rosy lips, honey-sweet in their full ripeness, smiled upon me; the eyes, now beaming softly, melting with love, and with the strange, witching, thrilling glance that holy passion alone can give, looked full upon me; the lips unclosed; the warm breath, sense-entrancing in its purity and sweetness, came softly against my fevered cheek and cooled its fire, as the sea-breeze from old ocean in the summer-time breathes cooling balm over the heated earth; a single sentence came from the lips and hovered on the air: “I love you!” so low, so soft, yet so sweet, a lover’s ears alone could catch the meaning of that sound.

I was happy, for I was in the dreamland of love—that bright clime which only the fiery heart can know. The face came nearer and nearer; a pair of arms, so round, so plump in their pinkish whiteness, that even Helen of Troy, the Grecian beauty herself, might have envied, were placed around my neck; the lips came close to mine; a moment I pressed them in their dewy fullness, drank the rich draught of love that lay imprisoned beyond their scarlet surface, and—

“Creak!”

With a start and a shiver that seemed to chill the blood leaping in my veins, I awoke from my dream of love.

“Creak!”

Again the strange noise came from the entry way. It sounded as if a board had yielded a little under a footprint, and then resumed its place again. In the night one hears even the smallest sounds. It was certain that some one was prowling about in the entry. What could he be doing there? It was evidently not a belated lodger seeking his room, for he would have walked boldly, and not with this stealthy caution.

Again I heard a sound—this time it was a foot-fall, there was no mistake. Some one was outside the door, and his purpose was mischief. Quietly I put my hand under the pillow and pulled out my revolver. I did not cock it, for I knew the click of the hammer would alarm the villain. That I did not wish to do, for I was determined to teach the thief a lesson.

Then came a sudden click, as though some one was tampering with the key in the lock. Joe was sleeping soundly. I did not attempt to awaken him, as I knew I would alarm the intruder if I did.

Another click, and the key turned in the lock and the bolt shot back at the same instant. Covered by the noise—as a military man might say—I cocked my revolver. I then realized that I had, in all probability, to deal with a gang of practiced burglars.

The door began to open slowly, and noiselessly I leveled my revolver in the direction of the door. The room was so dark I could not see a foot before me. I could only judge by the sound when the door was fully open.

“Easy, Tim!” came in a hoarse whisper from the doorway.

They were in the room then. The time for action was at hand. My finger was on the trigger; I was ready for them. Then I became conscious that the ruffians, with slow and stealthy steps were approaching the bed. I judged from this that they were well acquainted with the room.

Now, I thought, the time had come to play my part in this mysterious midnight drama, so, with a sudden spring, I leaped to the floor and pulled the trigger of my Colt. Crack went the hammer down on the cap—but no report followed. The revolver for once had missed fire. Quick as thought I jumped to the right, and at the same time re-cocked my pistol. The movement saved my life, for I received a terrible blow upon my shoulder that otherwise would have fallen upon my head—the blow given with, to me, some unknown weapon, for it was not a club, but seemed more like a sling-shot, but with a peculiar soft feeling, which did not, however, deaden its force; it almost paralyzed my left shoulder and knocked me to the floor. I pulled the trigger again; this time the weapon did not miss fire.

The flash of the discharge illuminated the room for a second and revealed a very melo-dramatic picture. In and by the doorway stood English Bob and three stalwart ruffians, while Joe sat up in the bed, revolver in hand, with a sleepy and astonished air. I caught a glimpse of the weapon in Bob’s hand that had knocked me down. I recognized it in an instant, for I had often read of it. It was a “sand-bag”—that is, a small bag shaped like the covering of a large sausage and filled with sand. A more dangerous weapon man never took in his hand, for a blow from it dealt on the head will generally kill outright and scarcely leave a mark. Now I knew—for it flashed upon my mind in an instant—how Pete Brown, the miner, had been killed; he had met his death by this weapon in the hands of English Bob or some of his men; he had been murdered for his gold-dust.

I felt it was a struggle for life or death. Scarcely had the light from the flash of the powder of my pistol died away ere, crack! crack! went Joe’s revolver and one fired by some of the attacking party.

A howl of pain from one of the ruffians announced that Joe’s shot had told. Luckily, as yet neither Joe nor I had been touched. A noise outside in the entry and on the stairs told that the house had been alarmed by the shots. The ruffians, frightened by the noise, made a rush for the entry.

“Let’s git, boys! We’re in a trap!” growled Bob, in his hoarse voice.

“Go fur ‘em, Jim!” yelled Joe, dashing off the bed and into the entry, blazing away at the retreating ruffians with his revolver.

I followed him. The entry was lighted dimly by candles in the hands of the astonished denizens of the hotel, who had flooded into the passage in very scanty costume, nearly all carrying a revolver or bowie-knife in their hands.

Three or four, with Jones, the landlord, at their head were coming up the stairs. Jones took in the situation in a moment.

“Throw down your we’pons and surrender, Bob, or I’ll put a bullet through you!” yelled Jones, holding his candle in one hand and flourishing a revolver in the other.

“The blazes you will!” shouted English Bob, who was indeed in a dangerous position, for the landlord and his party blocked up the stairway, while Joe and I and some other boarders were advancing behind; so that the ruffians were penned in between two fires.

“Throw down your we’pons!” again repeated the landlord.

“Go to —!”

And Bob consigned the landlord to an extremely hot region. During this short parley all parties had remained motionless.

“You be durned! If you don’t drop that shooting-iron inside of a minute, I’ll drill a hole right through you!” exclaimed Jones, mad as a hornet.

“You will, durn you!” growled Bob. “I’ll have the first fire!”

And, quick as lightning, he leveled at Jones and fired.

The landlord also fired, but in his haste the ball went high over the ruffian’s head. Not so, however, with the ball from the cracksman’s pistol, for it struck Jones in the shoulder and for a moment staggered him. The ruffians took advantage of the confusion occasioned by Jones’s wound among the defenders of the staircase, and dashed upon them. Terrified, the men on the stairway fired a hasty shot or two that damaged the walls only, and then fled. Bob and his crew took advantage of this, and, rushing down the stairs, escaped into the street, followed by shots from Joe and myself; but in the uncertain light, I think they escaped without harm.

Jones had fallen at the head of the stairs and fainted. I knew it was useless to pursue the ruffians in the darkness, and said as much to Joe, who was boiling with rage. One of the balls fired by the brave defenders of the staircase at the scoundrels had missed them and

taken off the top of Joe’s ear. It was only a slight wound, but it enraged Joe fearfully. In fact, it was a wonder that, in the *melee*, we had not been shot by mistake.

“The cussed fools!” growled Joe; “they couldn’t hit a house ‘less they were near enough to spit at it. If I could find the chap I’d tan him, blast me if I wouldn’t! the long-eared, no-souled gopher!”

We raised Jones up, carried him into a room, and put him upon a bed. His wound was quite serious.

The row had aroused all the town around the hotel, and crowds of the neighbors came flocking in. Jones, our landlord, was very popular, and loud and deep were the curses hurled against the villains.

“We ought to have a Vigilance Committee hyer to clean out these suckers!” cried the tall miner whom I have spoken of before and who went for the doctor for poor Browning.

His suggestion met with general favor.

“A Vigilance Committee! That’s bully!” shouted a stalwart fellow, flourishing a large bowie-knife, and a chorus of voices took up the cry.

“Bully for a Vigilance Committee!”

I foresaw that there was going to be a stormy time, and determined to give what little aid I could to wiping out the gang of desperadoes.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VIGILANTES.

“HYER’S the doctor!” shouted a stentorian voice; and the bustling little man entered.

“How do, gents?” he ejaculated, shortly. “Where’s Mr. Jones?”

“Hyer I am, doctor,” said Jones, himself, from the bed, for he by this time had recovered from his faint.

“Been in a leetle difficulty, eh?” asked the doctor, expertly examining the wounds, first stripping off the shirt.

“Leetle? Blazes! I reckon it would have bin a heap of a fight, ef they hadn’t got away with me so quick!” growled Jones. “Am I hurt bad, doctor?”

“Oh, no! the bullet’s gone clean through the shoulder. Take care you don’t catch cold in it; you’ll be all right in a few days,” was the consoling response of the doctor.

“Ef I could only git out to flax them fellers, I wouldn’t care a cuss!” cried Jones, emphatically. “See here, Bill Simmons, you’re a friend of mine, you air; now ef you don’t git up a Vigilance Committee an’ clean out these cussed thieves an’ gamblers, I’ll say you’re a durned skunk.” This was addressed to the stalwart miner, who had done such tall fighting in the gambling saloon.

“I’m your man, hide an’ ha’r!” cried Bill. “Say, boys, who’ll go with me?” he said, addressing those present.

A general yell of “Me! me!” from the entire crowd answered his question.

“Hold on, boys, a moment!” the little doctor sung out, getting on a chair. He had evidently great weight with the miners, as they all paused at his request, and prepared to listen to what he had to say.

“Remember, gents,” said the doctor, “that I am mayor of this city—chosen by your votes, and that it is my duty to see that the laws are carried out. Remember that a Vigilance Committee is something not recognized by the law; consequently to form a Vigilance Committee is to engage in an unlawful act, and it is my duty to warn you against it.”

A growl of disapprobation greeted these remarks. I knew the temper of the miners well, and I knew that, if the worthy mayor attempted to stem the current of popular vengeance, he would get himself into trouble; but, the little doctor was a shrewd politician, and knew the people he had to deal with well.

“Patience, gents,” he said, with a dignified wave of the hand. “Hear me out, then speak. As I have said, this Vigilance Committee is an unlawful proceeding, but what are the reasons that give rise to it? I will tell you, fellers-citizens! A gang of desperadoes have banded themselves together, right in the midst of our glorious city, which is the envy of the surrounding country; they have, at the dead of night, when all nature is wrapped in tranquil slumber, except the bull-frog and the owl, they have come right into our principal hotel and shot our esteemed friend, Bill Jones, than whom a better cuss does not exist, and who keeps as goodlicker as any man in the diggin’s. And not only that; last night they double-banked your mayor, who now addresses you, and won a hundred dollars from him at poker! These are the reasons why you form a Vigilance Committee. As a mayor, it is my duty to warn you against any overt act, but, as a man—a fellers-citizen—I sympathize with ye, and I suspend myself from the mayorship, until the leetle difficulty is concluded, so that I may go in with you, without breaking my oath of office, tooth and nail!”

A tremendous shout testified the crowd’s appreciation of this telling stump speech.

“And now, gents,” continued the doctor—or, we’ll give him his official title, and call him mayor—“I move that we adjourn to the public Square, kindle a bonfire, assemble ever honest

man in town who is willing to pull a trigger against these blackguards, choose a leader, and move upon the enemy's works at once."

Another shout showed the crowd's approval of the movement.

"And now, gents, I invite the crowd to licker down-stairs!"

The crowd accepted the mayor's invitation with alacrity, and, the "licker" duly disposed of, proceeded at once to the public Square.

It was now getting on to four o'clock. A huge bonfire was kindled in the center of the Square; runners were dispatched in diff-rent directions to summon the fighting-men, and those assembled on the ground gathered in little knots to talk over the approaching contest.

The miners were very bitter against "English Bob" and his gang; scarcely one of them but had some story to tell—how a miner had been fleeced out of his gold-dust through the agency of this gambling crew, and perhaps beaten half to death afterward. No wonder the feeling was strong against them.

As the morning was quite chilly, Joe and I kept close to the fire. I noticed that the big miner, whom Jones had addressed as Bill Simmons, was circulating around from one group to another, stoppin' awhile to talk with each little knot. At last he lounged up to where Joe and I stood.

"How are yer, stranger?" he said, nodding familiarly to me. "You raked that pile mighty well, t'other night, down at 'Bob's' saloon; cuss me, ef you didn't go fur it like lightning. Thar ain't many men that gits away with them as well as you did. You did it bully!"

I thanked him for his compliment, and modestly told him I did the best I could.

"I seed you arterwards in the skirmish, too. Fur a leetle feller you hit like chain-lightning. What mought yer name be?"

"Robert James," I answered.

"From the East, I s'pose?" he continued.

"Yes, from New York City."

"Wal, now! Do you know, I reckoned that you were from New York, 'cos they raise some lively boys thar. I'm from 'Egypt,' way down in old Illinois, nigh the Ohio. I don't want to 'pear curious, stranger, but what mought ha' bin your bis'niss out in York?"

"I am a detective," I answered.

"Show!" he cried, in astonishment; "one of the cusses that hunts down rascals? Wal, now, you've got right into bis'niss, ain't yer?"

"It looks like it," I answered.

"Do you know, we shouldn't have cleaned 'em out so the other night, ef a lot of 'Bob's' roughs hadn't bin up-country. I 'spect we'll have a lively time 'fore long, 'cos I've bin talking with the boys, an' they all agree that these cusses have got to leave town or fight. Ef they do show fight, an' we take any one on 'em alive, Judge Lynch will have work ahead fur him;" and with this sage reflection, Mr. Bill Simmons strolled away.

Six o'clock found about two hundred men in the Square—the entire fighting force that cared to take part in the melee. The mayor—we beg his pardon, we mean the ex-mayor, as he had self suspended himself until the end of this difficulty—made a short speech, explained the object of the "free American citizens," as he termed us, and closed by advising the crowd to choose a leader, he himself declining the honor.

For a few moments, the crowd was busy, evidently discussing whom to select. At last a heavy-bearded fellow in a red shirt, and with a stentorian voice, proposed Bill Simmons. Simmons was apparently a popular man, for the crowd instantly took up the name, and shouted "Simmons!" with all the power of their lungs. In obedience to the popular cry, Simmons mounted an empty flour-barrel, and from its top delivered a short and pithy speech.

"Boys, I'm much obliged to yours, but I ain't the man for yer money. I kin fight, but I can't lead; I ain't got the top-piece fur it, but I know a man that kin lead yer, an' he's a 'painter,' claws an' all. I nominate Robert James, the New York detective!"

Joe gave a yell of delight.

"I second that air nomination!" he cried.

All eyes were now turned upon me.

"This is Mr. James, the celebrated detective!" cried the mayor, introducing me. He was evidently bound to side with the crowd, though how he knew that I was celebrated was, and is, a mystery to me.

Joe and a sturdy fell w in a red shirt seized me by main force and carried me to the flour-barrel. A yell of delight greeted my appearance on the "stump."

"That's the cuss that cleaned out Bob's saloon t'other night!" I could hear passed round among the crowd. There was no backing out; they were resolved to make me a hero in spite of myself. Therefore I accepted the situation. After a short speech, expressing my thanks for the high honor they had conferred upon me, I suggested that a council be appointed to act with me, and advise upon important questions. The idea took with the crowd, and a council of five was instantly appointed consisting of my friend, Joe Sparks, Doctor Smith, the mayor, Bill Simmons, and a couple of miners known respectively as Wharton and Blake.

After the council was selected, they and I returned to Jones's hotel to deliberate.

Scarcely had we arrived there ere a miner rushed in, full of intelligence.

"What is it, spit it out?" cried Simmons.

"Bout all the gamblers an' thieves in the lower tow: I have gone into 'Bob's' saloon, an' they swear they'll fight till every durned sucker of 'em goes under afore they'll give in," said the miner, breathlessly.

"How many are there of them?" I asked.

"Nigh onto thirty," I guess; some have put fur the open country."

Just then another excited miner rushed in.

"Look abere, Bill, all the roughs up-town have gone into the Emerald saloon—I at Rooney's place—an' they're putting shutters up to the windows an' gittin' all ready fur a fight; an' they say thar ain't men 'nough in this air town to git 'em out!" and the courier stopped, blowing like a porpoise.

"Wal, Mr. Chief, what's the ticket?" asked Bill.

"We'll divide our force; you, with Wharton and Blake, go to the upper town and lay close siege to the saloon; make them a fair offer, that if they will leave town you will not molest them; if they refuse don't come to any open fight, but just keep outside the range of their fire, till we settle these fellows down here; then we'll come up and attend to them."

"Be hard work to keep the boys in; they're spoiling fur a fight," said Bill.

"I wish to avoid bloodshed, if possible," I replied.

"You're right, by hookey, squar', every time!" Bill replied and then d-parted. He went to the Square, drew off his men and took up his line of march.

With my command, accompanied by Doctor Smith and Joe as assistants, I filed down the street toward the saloon kept by "English Bob."

I halted my column at a safe distance, and then, with a handkerchief on a ramrod as a flag of truce, I stepped boldly forward to hold a parley with the enemy.

The shanty stood all alone on one side of the road. As I have before said, it was at the extreme end of the town, there being only a couple of shanties beyond it.

I marked the situation well as I advanced. If they showed fight, by means of the surrounding shanties I could bring my men up within easy revolver range, without exposing them much.

The saloon had all the shutters up, and I could see here and there in the walls, marks of freshly-cut loop-holes. They intended to resist, then, thinking, perhaps, that this attack was only a little outburst of passion, which would soon subside. It was a vain hope for I never saw people more determined than the men who had chosen me as their leader.

When I got within a hundred paces of the saloon, now turned into a fortress, a hoarse voice cried "Halt!" and the shining barrel of a rifle protruded from one of the loop-holes. I obeyed the gentle hint and halted.

"What the blazes do you want?" was the question that came from the loop-hole.

"We want the person of 'English Bob,' who assaulted Bill Jones, the hotel-keeper, this morning. If you give him up, all the rest can go, provided they leave town at once." Such was the ultimatum I delivered.

"You kin go to—" (a very hot place, not to be mentioned to ears polite) "durn ye. Ef we kin all go, an' ye will give a day to fix in, we'll git up an' dust."

"Not a day!" responded I, tersely.

"Then you kin come an' git us, 'n' be durned to yer!" was the answer of the ruffian, who was none other than the redoubtable "English Bob" in person.

I returned to my force and held a council of war. Joe was for making a dash upon the enemy at once; the mayor and I did not agree with him. We might possibly succeed but we should lose men in the attack, for they could pick us off from their stronghold as we advanced, like so many rabbits.

"No! no! Joe," I said, "that plan will never do. I have a scheme that will fix them; but, first, I want the house surrounded, yet don't want a man to expose himself in doing it. By taking advantage of the shanties, we can easily get within revolver range, and then not a man of them can escape."

"I see!" said the mayor; "you mean to starve them out!"

"Blazes!" cried Joe; "the moment night comes they'll make a dash an' git away, every durned cuss on 'em."

"Yes, if we remain inactive till then; but, Joe, I intend to have that shanty within two hours, and every ruffian in it, without losing or exposing any man of my force."

Joe looked at me, astonished, as also did the mayor.

"He'll do it!" cried Joe. "Ef any man kin, he kin!"

I sent a man up to Jones's hotel for a gallon of whisky, some cotton, and a few articles that I had noticed hanging in his bar-room, and which had suggested the plan I had formed for capturing the ruffians.

Then we commenced to surround the shanty. Owing to the excellent cover afforded by the neighboring houses, we succeeded in completely encircling the saloon, without giving them a single chance t fire at a man of our party.

Hardly was this movement accomplished when my messenger returned with the things I had sent him for.

As yet, we had not fired a shot. From my position behind a low shanty—by the way, it was astonishing to see how quick the inhabitants of the neighboring shanties got out of them when they saw that a fig: t was approaching—I had a good view of the rear of the saloon, which was loop-holed als . In fact, the shanty was in a fine state for defense, but not against the weapon I was about to use.

Now that my materials—a gallon of whisky, a large roll of raw cotton, an Indian bow and a couple of dozen arrows, the arrows tapering to the feather and heavy at the end, with a small spike—had arrived, I gave the signal, and my men opened a scattering fire upon the beleaguered house. This was to distract attention.

Then I took the arrows, tied some of the cotton upon the ends, dipped the cotton in the whisky, set fire to it, and then discharged the arrows from behind the low shanty that sheltered me into the roof of Bob's "shehang," which was in full view. The consequence was, the burning arrows set fire to the roof of the shanty, and, inside of twenty minutes, the whole building was in a blaze.

Fire was a foe the russians could not fight. At last, almost suffocated by the smoke, they rushed from the building and made a mad attempt to break through our line. A deadly fire received them. Bob and some six of the advance were shot dead at the first discharge; the rest, terrified at the fate of their comrades, threw down their arms and begged for mercy, which was granted them on their swearing to leave town at once.

As I stood, gazing on the burning shanty, the mayor—Doctor Smith—who had been examining Bob's body, came to me and said, quietly:

"I've got a secret to tell you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"STRIKING A LEAD."

I LOOKED at the mayor in astonishment. Mechanically I repeated his words.

"A secret to tell me?"

"Yes," he said; "keep quiet. Just ask some of the boys to carry the dead bodies of Bob and these other fellows into the shanty over there," pointing to the one that had served me as a breastwork.

I called Joe at once and gave him the orders, which he immediately attended to. Most all of our party were now busily engaged in trying to extinguish the fire, rolling out the barrels of whisky, and making sad havoc with the cigars.

The fire, however, burned briskly, and could not be subdued until the entire roof had been destroyed, and a good part of the side walls.

Hardly had the party finished carrying the dead bodies into the shanty, when a messenger from Bill Simmons arrived. He stated that Bill and his men were anxious to attack and begged me to allow them to go in and wpe out the "durned skunks."

"Better send Joe with all our force up there at once," said Doctor Smith. "Let them take one of these fellows that we captured here, and send him in to talk to them cut-throats in the upper saloon. I think when they hear that Bob's done for, they'll be glad to leave without any more trouble."

I acted upon Doctor Smith's suggestion at once, by giving Joe the necessary instructions, and within ten minutes he and his men were on the march for the upper town. I suspected that the mayor had some object in wishing to get rid of Joe and the miners, but what the object was, I couldn't guess.

"Now, come with me," said Smith, as Joe and the miners disappeared in the distance; and he led the way into the shanty where the dead bodies of the russians had been carried.

I followed him, a little astonished, I must own.

As soon as I entered the shanty, Smith closed the door carefully behind me.

"I suppose you have never studied medicine?"

I couldn't understand what the mayor was driving at."

"No," I answered.

"Splendid study," he said, with all the enthusiasm of the student. "I suppose you don't care particularly about looking at the dead."

"I can't say that I do," I replied.

"It's a wonderful study, the greatest thing in this world is for man to study man."

"Well, now, I should prefer to study woman," I replied, thinking, by a joke, to change the subject.

"It's all the same, man or woman," he answered, ruthlessly passing on without regarding my pleasantry. "Do you ever think what a strange piece of mechanism a man is, or a woman either? What is this strange principle that we call life? We can destroy it, but we

cannot create it, except by the laws of nature. See this piece of earth now," and he touched with his foot the body of "English Bob"; "thirty minutes ago it was living, breathing, acting—a king among the other creatures of the world; but, lo! a little bit of lead strikes it in the temple, and the life flies forever."

I couldn't very well understand why the doctor should bring me into the shanty to indulge in these sage reflections, particularly as, from what I had seen of him, they didn't seem to be at all in his line; but I held my tongue and simply bowed assent to his words.

"Did you ever 'strike a lead'?" he asked, suddenly.

This was a change of subject with a vengeance. "Striking a lead," in miner parlance, is to discover a vein of ore. As I had but just arrived at the "diggings," and hadn't as yet indulged any in mining, I was obliged to answer in the negative.

"Would you like to strike a lead?" was Smith's next question.

"Of course I should!" replied I.

"That is natural. Now, you are not blind; you of course know, or think, that I had some object in telling you to have these bodies brought in here, and suggesting that the men be sent off to the upper town?"

"Well, yes," I answered. "I must own I thought you had some purpose in view."

"You were right. I am about to strike a lead, and I'm willing to let you go partners with me, if you wish."

"I am much obliged to you," I replied.

"Not at all," he answered. "I consider that you've done our town a great service, and of course what helps the town helps me, as I own about thirty lots here."

"Thirty? Why, that must be a fortune!" I cried.

"No, 'tain't much of a fortune now, but I think in about five years or so I can realize something handsome from them, and then I'll go back East and settle down. But to my lead."

And the doctor knelt down by the side of Bob's body and commenced unbuttoning his vest. Then he passed his hand inside his shirt, fumbled there a moment, drew out, and held out to my astonished gaze, a buckskin money-belt, all stuffed with something. With a triumphant smile, he laid the belt down on the floor and proceeded to the body of the second ruffian. The searching operation was repeated, and with a like success, and so on he went, opening up his "lead" until he had laid seven well-filled money-belts upon the floor.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, with a quiet smile.

"What do they contain?"

In reply he took out his knife and cut a little slit in one end of one of the belts, and then held the belt up for my inspection. It was filled with gold-dust! I must acknowledge my heart gave a great leap at the sight. Here was a little fortune.

"What do you think of my 'lead'?" questioned the doctor; "it opens rich, don't it?"

"Yes," I replied; "but whose property is this?"

The doctor looked at me in astonishment.

"Why, it belongs to us, of course. You see, I had a suspicion that these fellows would have something valuable about them, for these seven are the head men of this gang. That's the reason they happened to be shot; they were in the advance, leading the others on. I consider, too, that you have as much right as myself to this booty, for your wit put them in our power, although I discovered the 'lead.'"

"How much money do you suppose there is, altogether?" I asked.

"Oh, between six and eight thousand dollars, I should judge. It will be at the least three thousand apiece; it ain't bad to take. You needn't have any scruples about taking your share; it is the product of all sorts of rascality, and certainly we have the best right of anybody to it."

It did not require much urging to induce me to accept the windfall that fortune had placed in my way. Every dollar was a step nearer to Nell, the girl of my heart; every dollar brought me nearer and nearer to my vengeance upon Livingstone. Little did he dream, in his stately mansion upon Fifth avenue, New York, surrounded by all the luxuries that wealth could procure, that, in the Far West, where the golden grains are wrested from the stubborn rock, or washed from the wave-rippled sands, his mortal foe was toiling to pile up the golden elements of power, that he might once again measure strength with, and perhaps hurl him to the dust.

"I'll take what fortune sends me without question," I cried.

"That's the true way to look at it," the doctor replied. "Now, buckle three of these belts around you, and I will take the other four. It will be a heavy load, but I guess we can stand it. After we get to my office, we'll empty the bags, weigh the dust, and divide it equally."

We buckled the belts on, as the doctor had said. It was indeed a heavy load, but I must say we bore up under it like men. This opera-

tion finished, the doctor searched their pockets. Nothing of any particular value was found, except that in Bob's pocket was a roughly-drawn diagram, apparently representing the interior of his shanty, and in one corner of the plan was an X, made with a pencil.

"What do you think of that?" asked the doctor, handing it to me.

I examined it carefully; in one corner of the plan was a figure 4, in another corner a figure 6.

"Does that suggest anything to you?" I asked.

"Yes; anything to you?" he replied, with a sly smile.

"It does indeed. I think that this spot marked with an X is where Bob has hidden something of value, and that the figures 4 and 6 mean four feet from one wall and six feet from the other."

"Yes; and the intersection of the four feet and the six feet line is the hiding-place."

"My idea exactly!" I said.

"Well, I must confess that when I found the money-belts contained gold-dust only, the thought occurred to me that he must have a hiding-place somewhere, because, of course, he must have some money in bars and bricks; and as he couldn't carry it with him, he must have hidden it somewhere."

"That is likely," I replied.

"Yes, I think so. Now, to-night we'll go quietly to the shanty over there, first providing ourselves with the necessary tools, and try to unearth Master Bob's treasure," and the worthy mayor chuckled and rubbed his hands with delight at the idea.

"Well, I suppose there's nothing more to be done here, and we may as well go and see how Simmons and the miners are getting along with their siege," I said.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "but the siege has probably been turned into an attack long before now. I know our boys here pretty well, and it's hard work to hold them in when there's a fight in prospect."

So Doctor Smith and I left the shanty, bearing the precious gold-dust, buckled securely around our waists, and took the road to the center of the town. Just as we reached the square we met Joe, Simmons, and all the miners, returning in triumph.

"Ho! ho! ho! chief!" shouted Simmons; "we've cleaned the durned cusses out."

"Have they gone, and without a fight?"

"That's so! We frightened them out of their boots!" cried Joe, with a hoarse chuckle.

"How did you manage to do that?"

"You'd have died laughing; you see, the cusses were full of fight, an' I know'd I couldn't get 'em out of their cussed shanty without a heap of trouble; so I went to work to sarcumvent 'em. The boys git the fore-pair of wheels off a wagon, an' mounts a piece of stovepipe onto it, like a cannon—an' it did look natural. Then we goes an' draws it up in range, an' makes a duriel fuss 'bout it, loading an' fixing; then I sends a flag of truce in to 'em, giving 'em ten minutes to git up an' dust; 'cos if they didn't, at the eend of that air time, I'd blow 'em to blazes. Ha! ha! ha!" and Simmons roared at the idea. "It frightened 'em nigh to fits. Ye see, they've got an old field-piece over in Gopher City, an' I s'pose they thought we'd sent over an' got it; but the cussed fools might have know'd that we hain't had time, an' ef we had got it, it would be a durned sight more likely to hurt the sellers than any one else. Wal, them cusses were jist like the old coon—they kin down, an' jist now the hull crowd air making toll tracks fur timber."

A yell of laughter from the crowd told their appreciation of the joke. Even a Vigilance Committee is not without its element of fun.

The mayor made a short speech, congratulating the Vigilance Committee upon the success that had attended their efforts, and as peace had been once more restored, and the black sheep had been driven from the "lively" town known as "Dead Man's Gulch," he suggested that the citizens disperse to their several homes. His suggestion was acted upon at once.

It was now near ten o'clock, and, as I hadn't had any breakfast, I began to feel hungry. The excitement under which we had all been laboring caused us to think of anything rather than of eating.

Joe, the mayor and myself all went in to breakfast together at Jones's Hotel. Breakfast being over, the mayor departed, making an appointment to meet me at eleven o'clock that evening, for the purpose of pursuing our search for the treasures of the dead ruffians. We had put off the division of the spoils until after our nocturnal expedition.

Joe and I retired to our room; there I showed him the money-belts; Joe's eyes grew as large as saucers at the sight.

"Jerusalem! you've made a big strike, ain't ye?" and Joe indulged in a low whistle of astonishment. "Say, guess you'll be going back to York, fore long. Hail Columbia! guess you'll be on somebody's trail, pizen sure, soon!"

"It is very likely, Joe," I answered; and then I told him of the midnight expedition that Mayor Smith and I had planned.

"He's a team, he is!" ejaculated Joe, forcibly.

Then I talked over our return to the East, for I had determined to go back at once. Joe was as willing as I was, and started out immediately to see how much he could realize on his "claim." Fortune again favored us here. Joe's partners were flush with money, and gave him six thousand dollars for his share. Joe came back wild with delight. I took my pencil and a sheet of paper, and sat down to calculate how we stood. Roughly figuring it up, I found that we were in possession of between ten and eleven thousand dollars—a small fortune. Enough, at any rate, to enable me to make head against Richard Livingstone. That was all I desired. True, too, I might strike another "lead" in my midnight expedition with Smith; but still, I did not count upon that, for I had money sufficient without it. If I could succeed in placing my hands upon a few thousand more, it would be welcome.

Evening came at last; and at eleven o'clock, punctual to the minute, came Dr. Smith.

"All ready?" he said.

"Yes," I answered.

It had been arranged that we should get a shovel and pick from his office, which was on our way. These, together with a dark lantern, and a couple of small carpet-bags, for the "loot" which we were to capture, comprised our outfit.

No one was abroad as we passed through the town, and so, luckily, we entirely escaped notice. Arriving at the ruined shanty, we entered it. By means of the roughly-drawn diagram that we took from Bob's pocket, we easily discovered the exact spot. Turning the light of the lantern onto the place we guessed at, we found that a plank in the flooring was loose. This was forced up; the ground under it showed marks of being freshly dug. There was no mistake—we had discovered the gambler's treasure. We had, for the second time, struck a "lead."

The spade sunk easily into the soft ground. About a foot below the surface we unearthed a common wooden soap-box, but it needed our united strength to lift it to the surface. Once there, we forced the cover off, and the buried treasure of "English Bob" was revealed to our wondering eyes. The contents of the box consisted of gold and silver "bricks" and bars, bags of gold-dust, and a few diamonds—the whole estimated by the doctor, at a rough guess, to be worth six'een or seventeen thousand dollars. Here was a fortune indeed!

Three trips did we make between Doctor Smith's office and the ruined shanty, before we conveyed all the treasure away.

As I panted under the heavy weight of the precious metal, I said to myself:

"I am toiling for vengeance; love and hate, the two ruling passions of this life, hold possession of my breast: soon, both will be satisfied. Livingstone, beware! I am on your track, and vengeance is burning in my veins! Nell, rejoice; I am seeking you out with love in my heart!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE ROAD.

Joe, Mayor Smith and myself all slept in Smith's office that night, guarding the treasure we had found. In the morning Smith brought out a pair of scales and proceeded to divide the spoils. Judging by the weight, there was about eighteen hundred dollars' worth of gold and silver, not counting the diamonds, which were probably worth three or four thousand more. The division was at last completed.

Joe and I instantly made arrangements to start at once for the East—first putting our treasure in the hands of an Express company and taking the receipt for the same, deliverable in Denver City.

We went round town, bid good-by to all our friends, received a hearty grasp of the hand from Mayor Smith and a whispered intimation that he would be East himself within six weeks, and then we started on our homeward journey.

Dead Man's Gulch was the "jumping-off place of creation," to use the expressive Westernism.

The stage-line which ran from Catfish City to the new diggings stopped at Dead Man's Gulch and went no further.

Joe Sparks, who had the history of the mining-camp at his tongue's end, explained to me that, though a hundred—yes, a thousand attempts had been made to strike "pay dirt" in the country beyond the "Gulch," no one had made any discoveries, but there was plenty of loose gold in the neighborhood of the Gulch, and therefore the town had prospered.

The "stage," as it was called, in which Joe and I took passage was nothing but a common hack, decidedly the worse for wear, and, as it happened, my companion and myself were the only passengers.

The driver was an uncouth sort of a chap, with a face like a pine-knot.

Jack Brannigan was his name, Joe informed me when he saw the driver come out to take charge of the stage, and after we commenced

our journey I chanced to remark that it was my impression the driver was about as ugly a fellow as I had ever set eyes on.

"Wal, I reckon the cuss will never be hung for his beauty," Joe avowed, with a prodigious grin.

"I should say there is not much danger of anything of that kind happening," I replied.

"And the cuss is jest as cross-grained as he looks, too," the Spider asserted.

"Is that true?"

"Oh, yes," my companion answered; "I have known all about the cuss ever since I struck this 'ere country. Long Jack is the handle that he most generally goes by, and the fellers who know jest what kind of a rooster he is are mighty skeery 'bout running up ag'in him, for he is on the fight bigger'n a wolf!"

"Well, I should think he would be an ugly customer in a row," I observed.

"He ain't no fist fighter, you mind!" the Spider declared, in a contemptuous way.

"The cuss is almost big enuff to eat me, or at least, anybody would be apt to think so to look at him," Joe continued. "But if it come to a good, squar' stand-up fight I would be willing to put up two to one that I could whale the day-lights out of him, and it wouldn't take me very long to do it, either."

I had seen enough of my companion to understand that he was no boaster and never inclined to over-rate his own abilities.

"He is one of the kind of men who immediately resorts to a weapon when he gets into any dispute, I presume," I remarked.

"You're right, for ducats!" Joe declared. "That is jest the kind of a hairpin he is, and the miserable cuss don't think any more of shooting a man full of holes, or of carving him up into mince-meat than I do of eating my dinner."

"He is a good man to keep away from, then, unless a fellow is anxious to get into trouble," I suggested.

"Yes, that is so, and if a fellow sees that he is in for a muss with a critter of this 'ere kind he wants to sail in and climb him from the start."

"Yes, that seems to me to be about the right kind of a game to play," I remarked.

Then my companion assumed a mysterious air, and, lowering his voice as though afraid of being overheard, said:

"Pard, I reckon thar is danger of our having a row with this pesky cuss afore we git through with this trip."

I was taken completely by surprise by this revelation, for it was entirely unexpected.

"What makes you think so?" I asked, being careful to speak in the same cautious tone.

"Wal, I saw that the cuss was a kinder looking cross-ways at us afore we started," the Spider exclaimed.

"You see, pard, when a man takes up fighting for a business, about the furst thing he learns is to watch the eyes of the feller he is going up ag'in."

"Ah, yes, I understand!" I exclaimed. "That is so he will be able to detect when his antagonist is about to attack."

"That is it! You have got it right the furst time!" Joe declared.

"I took a few lessons in fencing once, and my instructor always warned me to watch my opponent's eyes," I remarked.

"Sart'in! and arter a man gits the hang of the thing he ain't apt to make n^o mistake," Joe observed with the air of an oracle.

"That I can readily believe," I responded.

"I jest passed the time o' day with Long Jack when he came out to look arter his horses," the Spider explained. "And I smelled a mice jest as soon as I got a good look at his eyes."

"He has got it in fur us, pard, and you kin bet your bottom dollar on it too, every time!"

"Yes, but why should he wish to quarrel with us?" I asked. "It seems to me that it would be a most unreasonable proceeding."

"You don't get the hang of the thing, I reckon," Joe remarked with a grave shake of the head.

"I certainly must admit that I do not," was my answer.

"I kin show you the rights of the thing in a jiffy, I reckon," the Spider asserted.

"This 'ere Long Jack is a chum of English Bob and his gang."

"Ah, yes, now I understand!" I exclaimed.

"English Bob's saloon was allers Long Jack's loafing place when he was in the camp," Joe explained. "Why, I reckon I have seen him there fifty times, and it is only natural, you know, that he should kinder hanker to git a crack at us, seeing that we cleaned out the gang he used to go with."

"Oh, yes, it is reasonable for him to wish to avenge his friends, but as we are now on our guard the chances are great that if he tries any game of that sort he will be apt to get the worst of it."

"Wal, I reckon we kin hold our own if we get any show at all," the Spider responded.

"But this 'ere Long Jack is a pison cuss, and as he knows I kin put up a stiff old fig't, either with my fists or weapons, and he has found out too that you ain't no slouch, it is my opinion

that he won't dare to try for to come at us openly."

"Yes, yes, I catch your idea! You think he will endeavor to take us unawares," I suggested.

"It is my notion that he will try to play some game of that kind."

"Well, we must be on the watch, and if he succeeds in catching us napping he will be smarter than I think he is," I observed.

"I don't exactly see how the critter is a-going to git at us," Joe remarked, shaking his head with a puzzled air. "But I am satisfied from the way he looked at us that he has got some scheme in his noddle, and I reckon we will make a big mistake if we don't keep our eyes peeled."

I replied that we certainly would not be wise if we did not watch the river.

We had left Dead Man's Gulch at seven in the morning, and as the road was a bad one it took the stage until twelve to get to the first stopping place, some twenty-eight miles away.

Mud Creek the station was named, and it had once bid fair to be a good-sized place, but the mines in the neighborhood had suddenly "petered out," to use the mining expression, and the inhabitants had sought "fresh fields and pastures new."

In the mining regions of the far West towns grow up in a single week, and die fully as rapidly.

Mud Creek was the dinner-station, and while the passengers partook of the meal the horses were changed.

There were now only about a half-a-dozen horses left in the town—it is a peculiarity of the new settlements in the mining region, that when a man resolves to move from the camp in which he is located on account of the gold playing out that he usually moves his "shanty" too unless the distance is too great.

As the houses are constructed in the most flimsy manner this is not such a very difficult task.

The dinner was in readiness when the hack arrived; a good-natured little Irishman, with a big bosom wife, had charge of the station, and he ushered the passengers into the dining-room, as soon as they alighted.

There was a couple already seated at the table, a middle-aged, smooth-faced, sleek-looking man dressed in rather better clothes than the majority of travelers wear in the wilds of the far West.

A stranger to the men and customs of the mining regions would have been apt to make the mistake of thinking he was a minister, or if not a clergyman, a deacon at least, but an old-time Westerner, at the first glance, would have guessed that the gentleman was a bright and shining light of the adventuring band who follow so closely on the heels of the pioneers of civilization, a "sport" who made his living by the aid of the printed pasteboards and the dotted ivory cubes.

The sport's companion was a woman of twenty-five or thereabouts, tall, well-formed and rather good-looking.

She was dressed in a neat, dark-gray traveling suit, and presented an extremely lady-like appearance.

"Wal, now, if this hyer ain't a piece of luck!" the driver exclaimed, the moment he saw the sport.

"Why, Doc, you ar' jest the man I want to see. I have got a bit of business that I want to talk to you about.

"Come out hyer, so I kin have a chin with you!"

"Certainly, certainly! of course," the sport replied.

And then he followed the driver from the room.

I had my eyes on the woman's face as the sport departed, so I noticed that a shade passed over it, and she shot a glance full of distrust and suspicion after the pair.

"What does this mean, I wonder?" I said to myself.

Then I bowed politely to the lady and took a seat at the table.

She returned my salutation courteously, and then, to my surprise, fell to studying my face, and an expression appeared on her countenance which seemed to indicate that she was puzzled about something.

I took another look at the woman, thinking possibly that I had encountered her at some previous time, for her face had a familiar look, but I could not recall the circumstance of having ever met her.

The Irishman proceeded to serve the dinner, and in a few minutes the driver made his appearance.

"Doc says you ar' not to wait for him, but to go right ahead with your dinner," Long Jack said, addressing the lady.

"Thar's a leetle bit of business that he has got to look arter, and he will be back in a few minutes."

The lady nodded assent and smiled pleasantly at Long Jack; but as he turned away from her to take his seat at the table, I saw an expression of angry resentment flash rapidly across her face.

It passed away almost immediately, and if I had not been watching her face intently, but in a covert manner, I would never have noticed it.

"I say, Mickey, you need not put in the bosses right to onc't, for I don't expect to git away before one o'clock," the driver said to the Irishman.

"Phwat are yeest afer doing?" the Irishman exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Thar's a couple of friends of the boss who are on a hunting-trip up in the mountains, and they sent word to the old man that they calculated to take the stage at this p'int to-day, but they reckoned they wouldn't be in much before one o'clock; so the old man sent word to me that I was to wait until one o'clock for them."

"Oh, yis, I see," the Irishman replied.

Although apparently busy with my dinner, I was keeping a close watch on the face of the lady, and, while the driver was speaking, I could plainly see that there was a look of distrust in her eyes, and the thought immediately came to me that she did not believe the driver was telling the truth.

This was a very strange circumstance, and I meditated deeply over it.

Why should the driver tell a falsehood about the matter? What had he to gain by so doing?

It was an extremely mysterious affair, and the more I reflected upon the matter the more puzzled I became.

In about ten minutes, just as we were about through with the meal—for the station dinner was far from being an elaborate one—the sport came burrying in.

"Well, I am not too late to get something to eat, I hope!" he exclaimed in a jovial way.

"I sent you word not to wait, Clara," he continued. "But I was detained longer than I expected."

"Arrah, Doc, there's bakes of grub for yeest!" the Irishman declared.

The sport then seated himself by the side of the lady and began his meal.

Joe and I had finished, so we rose and went out to have a look at the, almost, deserted camp.

There was a little mountain streamlet running through the place, and we took our way down a narrow trail whith followed the course of the river.

We went on for a few hundred yards, until we came to where the trail wound around some beetling rocks, which jutted out of the ground, and then passed through a thicket of pines.

"I say, pard, this 'ere is jest the place for a nice, quiet smoke," the Spider suggested.

"Suppose we sit down and take a pull at our pipes?" he continued.

"With all my heart!" I replied. "It is a good idea, for it will help us pass the time away; we have quite a wait."

"Yes, and we kin keep our eyes on the blamed old hearse from ere, so it can't git away without us."

This was the truth, for from our position we commanded a view of the station, and could see the moment the horses were brought out to be harnessed to the stage.

We seated ourselves in the shelter of a little clump of junipers, so we were hid from the gaze of any one in the town, although we commanded a complete view of the camp.

A moment after we sat down, the driver and the sport came out of the station.

They halted in front of the house and cast searching glances around them.

There was something about this movement which excited my suspicions.

"I say, Joe, do you notice the way the two men are looking about them?" I asked.

"O', yes, I see 'em."

"Do you suppose they are trying to discover what has become of us?"

"Wal, I dunno," my companion replied in a reflective way.

"Mebbe they are," he continued. "But I don't see why they should trouble their heads about us."

"Neither do I, but somehow, I have got the notion that they are looking after us," I replied.

"By sitting down in the shelter of the evergreens we have evidently concealed ourselves, and although we can see them they cannot see us."

"I reckon that is so."

The two gazed about them, surveying all quarters of the compass for a few minutes, and then they walked off, going down the valley in the opposite direction to the one which I and my companion had taken.

"If they are arter us they will not be able to smell us out by going off to the southward," the Spider declared with a grin.

"Ob, I don't think they are in search of us now," I responded.

"Probably it was only a bit of idle curiosity on their part which prompted them to see where we had gone," I continued.

"By the way, do you know this Doc, who is evidently a sport?" I inquired.

"No, I never ran up ag'in him afore, but I reckon there ain't no doubt 'bout his being a sport, to judge from the looks of the critter."

"The woman with him seems to be lady-like and agreeable, a rather superior creature to be

the wife of a man who is obliged to get his living in such a precarious way."

"Wal, this 'ere sport 'pears to me to be much better than the ordinary run on 'em," the Spider remarked. "And I should not be surprised if he was from the East."

At this moment the woman came out of the station, and we stopped talking in order to watch her.

She looked after the sport, and the driver, until they disappeared around a bend in the trail, and then she came up the road heading directly for us.

She advanced at a moderate pace, as though she was merely walking to pass away the time, and every now and then she cast a look behind her.

"I reckon she acts kin'ler queer, hey?" the Spider suggested.

"Yes, there does seem to be something odd about her movements," I replied.

The woman followed the trail and came straight on to where we sat, and when she came around the rocks, so that she had a view of us, she did not seem to be at all surprised.

She smiled, nodded slightly, and then cast a careless glance down the trail, as if she wished to ascertain whether any one was watching her or not.

Apparently, she was satisfied that she was not observed, for she came slowly on until she got within the shelter of the evergreens, then she halted, fixed her eyes on me and said:

"I would like to speak to you alone for a few moments, if this gentleman will be kind enough to afford me an opportunity," nodding to Joe as she finished the sentence.

"Sart'in, marm!" exclaimed the Spider, springing to his feet. "Mighty glad to be able to oblige ye!" And then with a polite bow, Joe sauntered off up the trail.

The woman seated herself upon one of the boulders, cast a searching look with her cold, clear, gray-blue eyes upon my face, and said:

"I think this is not the first time that we have met."

"Well, madam, I must admit that the thought occurred to me," I replied. "Your face certainly seems to be familiar, and yet when I strive to recall when and where we encountered each other I find that my memory is at fault."

"It was in New York City," she remarked.

"Yes, I presume it was, but when you make that statement it does not aid me to remember the particulars of our meeting."

"It was almost five years ago."

I reflected for a moment, and then I shook my head, for I could not remember the circumstance.

"It was a cold and gloomy night in early spring; it was near midnight, and you were coming to New York on one of the Brooklyn ferry-boats.

"There were not many passengers, and you happened to stroll out to the stern of the boat just in time to prevent a wretched girl from jumping overboard—a poor, despairing, desperate creature, who was intent upon burying herself and her sorrows beneath the dark waters."

There was a world of pathos in her voice as she spoke, and the words immediately recalled the scene to my mind.

"Ah, yes; yes, I remember you now!" I exclaimed.

"But it is not strange that I did not recognize you at first, for you have changed greatly since that time," I added.

"Yes; that night was the turning-point in my life," she remarked.

"Ah, me!" and she uttered a deep sigh. "I do not think there ever was a more miserable creature in this world than I was on that dreadful night."

"Yes, I can recall that you were so utterly given to despair that you thought the world held no hope for you."

"I was in a terrible situation, so it was no wonder that I was eager to end my sorrows by seeking refuge in another world," she replied.

"I was a country girl, young, foolish and inclined to be giddy, she continued.

"I had no mother to advise me, for I had the misfortune to lose both my parents at an early age, and I was brought up by my aunt, a wealthy woman, but narrow-minded, and as she never had any children of her own, she was not able to understand or sympathize with the desires of youth."

"In her anxiety to bring me up in the right way, she became a cruel, nagging tyrant, and rendered me so uncomfortable that when a good-looking stranger made my acquaintance and professed to be deeply in love with me, it was not a hard matter for him to persuade me to elope with him to New York, where we were married."

"But soon I awoke from my dream of bliss," the woman continued, with a deep sigh.

"Within a week I made the discovery that my husband was nothing but a miserable thief and had married me with the idea that he could in time, train me to aid him in his robberies and when I told him that I would rather starve than steal, he swore that if I did not do as he wished he would kill me."

"The miserable scoundrel!" I exclaimed, deeply moved by the pathetic tale.

"I replied hotly that I meant what I said; death was preferable to such a life," she related.

"My reply angered him, and he advanced toward me with uplifted hand, and no doubt I would have been cruelly beaten if the detective officers had not at that moment entered the room and arrested my husband. I was also made prisoner, accused of being an accomplice.

"He was tried and convicted, but, although the detectives firmly believed me to be guilty, yet, for want of evidence, I was released."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING.

I HAD listened with the deepest interest to the story, and now remarked that no doubt detective officers often made the mistake of confounding the innocent with the guilty.

"In my case it was not a wonder that they should not believe my story that I had no hand in my husband's misdeeds, for the very clothes and jewelry which I wore, presents from my husband, were all stolen."

"Oh, what a miserable wretch he must have been!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, but Heaven soon punished him for the base wrong which he had done me, an innocent and unsuspecting girl, for even while on his way to prison, in a desperate attempt to escape he was killed by the officers who had him in charge."

"You are right, it was surely a righteous doom!" I exclaimed.

"After my discharge from the prison where I had been confined during the court proceedings I wandered around the city, utterly wretched and disconsolate," the woman continued.

"I had but a few cents in change in my pocket, and knew not where to lay my head; finally, late at night, I went on board of one of the Brooklyn ferry-boats, having come to the conclusion that I would seek a refuge from my sorrows beneath the dark waters, but there were so many people on the boat that I could not get a favorable opportunity to carry out my purpose, and was obliged to wait for the return trip."

"It was a fortunate circumstance as it happened, for by waiting you encountered me, and I succeeded in persuading you to change your mind," I remarked.

"Yes, the argument you used was an extremely strong one," the lady observed with a smile.

"When I told you that I was utterly wretched and wanted to die, because I was all alone in the world without friends or money, you, in the most generous manner put a twenty-dollar bill in my hand, without ever taking the trouble to ask me for the particulars of my sad story."

"Well, I suppose the action was not as prudent as it might have been," I observed.

"But I was always an impulsive fellow, and I had an idea, too, that I was a good judge of human nature."

"There was something in your face which made me think you were fit for something better than to rush blindly to a watery grave, and then, too, at that time I happened to have plenty of money, and could well afford to spare the twenty dollars," I added, laughing.

"Ah, it was a generous action, no matter whether you had much money or little!" she declared.

"Your timely aid, accompanied as it was by encouraging words, made me think that it was possible that there might be a future for me," she related. "So I took your money, and went to a hotel that night where, on my bended knees I prayed that the Lord would have mercy upon me, and forgive me for daring to think of taking the life which he had given."

"Yes, it is a grievous sin for a man, or woman, to rush unsummoned into the presence of the Creator," I declared.

"Still, I can understand just how you felt, for I have been the prey of dark despair myself, and at such a moment the unfortunate wretch is heedless whether he lives or dies," I continued.

"It really seemed as if the meeting with you turned the current of my luck," the lady affirmed. "For the next morning I arose feeling better than I had since the cloud of trouble descended upon me, and I made up my mind to do my best to earn an honest living."

"I got a frugal breakfast in the restaurant of the hotel, and then looked over the advertisements in a morning paper which I purchased.

"While I could not boast of any accomplishments, yet I understood all about housework and was a good needlewoman."

"There was an advertisement of a lady going to California who desired a nurse-girl and seamstress, and although I was afraid that the lack of recommendations would hinder me from getting the situation, yet I made bold to apply for it."

"The chances were in your favor, for it is not always easy to find any one willing to go to such a distance," I remarked.

"Yes, so it happened in this case. The lady was a middle-aged Englishwoman, on her way to join her husband in California. He was an engineer employed at one of the mines at Grass Valley."

"I told the lady frankly that as I had always lived with my aunt, and had never been out to service, I had no recommendations. As it happened, she was pleased with my appearance, so I obtained the situation and departed for California that very afternoon."

"You were singularly fortunate, and you see how unwise you were to give way to despair," I remarked.

"Yes, your kindly interference completely changed the current of my life," she observed. "Before I had been a year in California I met the gentleman who is now my husband, and after a brief courtship we were married," and as the lady came to the end of the sentence she heaved a deep sigh.

I was rather perplexed by the situation. If her husband was a sport, a gambler, as I suspected, it would not be hardly the thing to congratulate her upon making such a marriage, and so, not exactly knowing what to say I held my peace, contenting myself with nodding my head in a friendly way.

"Are you well enough acquainted with the men and manners of this wild Western land to detect from my husband's dress and appearance what business he follows?" she asked, abruptly.

As the question was put thus plainly, I felt that I ought to answer it without attempting to beat about the bush.

"I imagined from your husband's looks that he is what is called a sport," I replied.

"Correct! the Western term for a gambler," she observed, in an extremely matter-of-fact way.

"Possibly, now that you are acquainted with my history, the thought has come to you that I have been almost as unlucky in my second marriage as in my first," she observed with a sad smile.

"Well, really to tell the truth, I have not given the matter a thought," I answered.

"Possibly you have been long enough in the West to understand that a sporting man—a gambler, is not considered to be such a dreadful creature as he is in the East," she said.

"Yes, I am aware of the fact," was my reply.

"He was a doctor with a good practice when I married him, Doctor James Lawson, of Grass Valley, but he was always inclined to be a little wild, and would most rather sit down with a jovial party to a card-table than attend to his patients, and so it followed that he gradually lost his practice, and, finally, was compelled to take up the life of a sport."

"That was certainly unfortunate," I remarked.

"As far as I am concerned I have no complaint to make, for he has always been one of the best and kindest of husbands, but since we have come into this country we have had a terrible run of ill-luck, and I greatly fear that my husband, who is easily influenced, has made friends with some bad men who will be apt to get him into trouble."

"That is certainly unfortunate," I assented, not exactly knowing what to say, for I could not understand why she should take the trouble to make this disclosure to me.

"As a rule, my husband never has any secrets from me, but since this run of bad-luck commenced in Dead Man's Gulch, I am convinced that he has entered into an arrangement with some men which he is desirous of keeping from my knowledge."

"It is a rule with nearly all sporting men when they have a fearful run of bad-luck in any particular town to go away, hoping to thus change their evil fortunes into good," she continued.

"Yes, I have heard of such a scheme," I responded.

"I have always acted as my husband's banker, and when our store of cash was reduced to a certain sum then we concluded that it was time for us to be on the move."

"We arrived at that condition last week, so we left Dead Man's Gulch, but, to my surprise, we stopped at this place, and we have been here ever since."

I expressed my surprise at this, for, as I said, there did not seem to be any chance for a sport to make a living in a deserted town.

"That is exactly what I said to my husband, but he attempted to satisfy me by vague hints that he had been told that one of the abandoned mines was really valuable, and he had an idea that something might be made out of it," she explained.

"Is your husband a practical miner, who would be able to tell by personal inspection whether a claim was valuable or not?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" she replied, immediately. "He knows nothing at all about such things, and so the moment he began to explain that that was why he had halted here I knew he was deceiving me."

"It is a very strange affair," I suggested.

"I think, that, owing to his run of ill-luck, he has allowed himself to be persuaded to go in

with some of these mountain desperadoes who infest the trails in this part of the country," she remarked, an anxious expression on her face.

"But to judge from your husband's looks, there isn't anything of the desperado about him," I observed.

"Oh, no; he would not join in any outrages, I am sure—that is, would not be a party to any violence; but he could be of a great deal of assistance to the outlaws without actually going with the gang," she explained.

"Possibly you have heard of Black Bert and his road-agent band?" she continued.

I answered in the affirmative, but further said I knew but little about the man or his deeds, in conclusion remarking:

"About all I know of the fellow is that there is a man who calls himself Black Bert, and he commands a gang of outlaws who have committed various depredations in the section of country lying between Catfish City and the mining-camp of Dead Man's Gulch."

"He has proved himself to be an unusually active and skillful outlaw," Mrs. Lawson remarked. "It is only about three months since he began operations, but during that time he has succeeded in making a name for himself, and although there have been half a dozen determined attempts made to capture him, yet none of the parties have ever succeeded in getting sight of the outlaw, and the agents in regard to him are so certain that at no one time do they know what the man looks like, or even how many men he has in his band."

"I can readily understand that it is to his advantage to keep the facts concealed as much as possible," I observed.

"Oh, yes, that is undoubtedly true," she replied. "When this outlaw succeeded in evading the searches which were made for him so cleverly, it was suspected that he had spies in the mining-camp who warned him of what was going on in time for him to hide away."

"Well, I believe that is the usual way in which these outlaws manage," I suggested.

"I am sadly afraid that my husband has been persuaded to become one of Black Bert's spies, and I think his stay in this place was for the purpose of putting himself in communication with the outlaws.

"It is my husband's intention to try his luck in Catfish City for awhile, and in a bustling town like that, which is the headquarters for three stage-routes, he could be of great assistance to the outlaws by giving them information in regard to plunder and timely warning of any attempts to capture them."

"Certainly his services would be valuable," I remarked.

"I am sadly afraid that the bad luck which has pursued my husband has induced him to listen to the voice of the tempter," she declared with a grave shake of the head.

"It is certainly unfortunate if such is the case," I replied.

"Probably you think it is strange I should speak to you about the matter," she said, in a peculiar, abrupt way.

"But, in the first place, I recognized you and desired to extend my thanks for the service which you once so kindly rendered me," she continued. "And then, too, I thought there was a chance that I might be able to repay the debt I owe you."

"Oh, that is all right!" I exclaimed. "Don't mention it, I beg! At the time I met you I was leading a pretty fast life, and if I had not given you the twenty dollars it is certain that I would have thrown it away before morning."

"Ah, I did not mean that I wished to give you back the money," she replied with a sad smile. "For that, unfortunately, is out of my power, at present, owing to the run of bad luck which has attended my husband during the past month."

"But I think I can do you a service, unless I am greatly mistaken."

"You are on your way to the East!"

"I am," I replied.

"Probably you have been fortunate in your ventures, and having made all the money you require at present, have concluded to go back to your former home—believe me," she continued in an abrupt and earnest way, "I do not seek to pry into your affairs out of any mere idle curiosity, but have a deep purpose in view."

"Oh, I have no objection to answering the question," I replied. "I have managed to make a goodly sum of money, and as that is all I came to the West for, there is no reason now why I should not return to my old home."

"You are surely not imprudent enough to carry the money with you?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no, I have only a moderate amount—enough to pay my expenses to Denver, and a trifle over, possibly."

"I am glad of that, for I think there is a plot on foot to rob you, and that is why I wished to give you a warning."

I was considerably astonished by this disclosure, and I presume the lady detected an incredulous look on my face for she immediately said:

"I suppose that this does not seem possible, but I think I can soon show you that there is a deal of ground for suspicion."

"I have too much confidence in your good sense to think you would harbor such an idea without there were good grounds for it," I replied politely, but at the same time I must admit that I did think the idea was rather far-fetched, and I doubted if she could bring forward evidence to justify the suspicion.

"In the first place I suspected from the way the driver looked at you that something was wrong," she began.

"I can throw a little light on that subject," I explained. "Myself and companion had some trouble in Dead Man's Gulch with a tough gang with whom the driver is on intimate terms."

"We succeeded in getting the best of the fellows, and, as is only natural under the circumstances, the driver would like to get a chance to do us an ill turn."

"Well, that explanation might account for Long Jack's hostile looks," she admitted. "But here is another circumstance which I don't think you will be able to explain."

"This wait of the stage until one o'clock."

"To accommodate the hunting-party," I suggested. "So the driver said."

"That is utter nonsense!" she declared, in an impatient way.

"In the first place, if the hunting-party wanted to take the stage they could do so at any time, but they waited until one o'clock."

"That certainly seems to be the truth," I was compelled to admit.

"In the second place there is no hunting party for it must be a small one, three or four men only, etc., they could not find accommodation in the coach, and as the Indians are ugly at present, and resent any intrusion of the white men into their territory it would be as much as the lives of the hunters are worth to venture away from the towns, so it is certain that if a small party should dare to go up into the mountains, into the Indian Territory, they would be killed by the red-skins within four and twenty hours."

"Yes, I know from what I have heard of the temper of the Indians since I have been in Dead Man's Gulch that you are correct in that statement, but when the hunting party was spoken of I gave little heed to the matter, and did not think of questioning the truth of the statement."

"The yarn about the hunters is but an excuse to account for the delay."

"But why do we wait?" I inquired.

"To give time for the driver to send word to the outlaws that there is somebody in the stage who is worth robbing, and to allow them an opportunity to get ready for the attack!" she declared in a tone of voice which plainly indicated that she felt certain she had guessed correctly in regard to the matter.

I meditated over the affair for a few moments, and now that the explanation had been given I saw how reasonable it was.

"Yes, yes, I believe you are right!" I exclaimed.

"I feel sure of it!" Mrs. Lawson replied. "And that is why my husband and Long Jack are holding these mysterious conferences."

"Well, both my companion and myself are fully armed, and unless the road-agents attack us with an overwhelming force, we ought to be able to beat them off," I suggested.

The lady shook her head.

"From the way in which you speak I judge that you have not had any experience with these outlaws who make a business of robbing the coaches," she said.

"No; I have read of their proceedings; that is all."

"In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the outlaws arrange the attack in such a way that the passengers, no matter how well armed they may be, are not allowed the chance to offer any resistance, for if they attempted to show fight it would only result in their death, and so they submit."

"Of course, a man could not very well do anything else under the circumstances," I remarked.

"I think the probabilities are great that if the stage is attacked by road-agents—and I feel positive that it will be—the attack will be made in such a way that it will be madness for you to attempt to resist, so you had best prepare yourself to submit with as good a grace as possible."

"Secure the most of your money, so that you will not be robbed of all you have, and instruct your companion to do the same."

"Do not hide it all away, you know, because if you are without any money the outlaws will immediately suspect that you have hidden it away," she continued.

"Yes, that is true, and I will take good care not to make a mistake of that kind; and now I must thank you for your friendly warning," I said, gratefully.

"Ah, do not speak of that," she replied. "I am but returning the kindness which you showed me five years ago."

"You cast your bread upon the waters then, and it has returned to you after many days,

just as in the old Scriptural saying," she continued.

"But one favor I will ask of you, though," Mrs. Lawson added. "My husband is weak, but not willfully bad; he is terribly pushed for money, and so has listened to the voice of the tempter. If he should get into trouble, pray have mercy upon him!"

And then, without waiting for my reply, she turned and walked swiftly away.

Joe, who had been watching the interview from a distance, now approached.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTACK.

KNOWING that the Spider could be trusted to keep a secret, I did not hesitate to reveal to him the main particulars of my interview with Mrs. Lawson.

"I reckoned that pesky stage-driver had it in for us!" he exclaimed.

"To my mind the warning is well worth considering," I remarked.

"Oh, yes, there ain't any doubt 'bout that!" Joe declared, immediately. "Some of these women are right smart in smelling out a game of this kind, and there ain't much doubt in my mind that she has sized the thing up about right."

"We had better stow away our valuables then," I said.

We had taken a hundred dollars apiece, thinking that would be amply sufficient to pay our way to Denver, where we would get the money which we had forwarded by Express, and as all we had paid out of the hundred was our fare to Catfish City we had considerable money on hand.

"Let me see," I remarked, reflectively. "I think that if we allow the road-agents to get about twenty dollars apiece out of us it would be about doing the fair thing by these knights of the road."

"I reckon that fifteen is all I shall give them," the Spider suggested. "A feller of my stamp ain't supposed to go around heeled like a millionaire."

As it happened the most of our money was in bills, so retaining the coin in our pockets we carefully folded the bills and put them under the sweatband of our hats.

This was my idea and one that pleased my companion greatly.

"I have often heard of coves—a-stowing away their ducats in the lining of their coats, and in their boots, but the hat trick is a new dodge," he remarked.

"I hope it will succeed," I replied. "At any rate it is the best we can do under the circumstances."

We remained on the hill-side until five minutes of one, and then returned to the station, arriving there just as the horses were brought out to be attached to the stage.

The driver came slouching up, the sport following a little in the rear.

Long Jack looked at his watch.

"It wants two minutes of one," he said. "And I don't see hide nor hair of them ar' hunting pilgrims!"

The doctor pretended to take a careful look up and down the trail.

"There is no sign of them coming in any direction," he remarked.

"We will give 'em five min'tes lee-way," Long Jack announced.

"At five min'tes past one this hyer hearse is a-going to start, pilgrims or no pilgrims!

"I am one of the kind of fellers w'ot obeys orders even if he breaks owners," he continued in a boastful way.

"They said for me to wait hyer until one; I am going to gin 'em five min'tes grace, and then I'll cut my lucky!

"Better git on board so as to be ready for a start, for we are going right sharp at the time I sed."

Mrs. Lawson came from the station at this moment, her husband assisted her into the stage, then got in himself while Joe and I followed his example.

Mr. and Mrs. Lawson sat on the back seat while I and my companion occupied the front one.

"I would like to know where in thunder the driver reckoned to put any more passengers," Joe remarked. "'Cos this here thing is as full as it can stick now."

"I believe that he only expected two more and he would have taken them on top with him," Lawson explained.

The sport had an easy, good-natured way with him, the sort of man who would be apt to produce a favorable impression upon strangers.

Of course when I made my companion acquainted with the warning with I had received I did not betray Mrs. Lawson's confidence by revealing that she was apprehensive that her husband was in league with the road-agents.

The driver mounted to the box and at exactly five minutes past one he cried out:

"Time's up, and we ar' off! If the pilgrims put in an appearance, ole man 'tter we ar' gone, jest gi'n 'em my compliments and say that

Detective Gordon's Grip.

I couldn't afford to wait all day for them so they will have to take the next stage; so long!"

This speech was addressed to the Irishman, who grinned as if he had an impression the driver had cracked a famous joke, then the driver chirruped to his horses and away they went.

For ten or fifteen minutes no one spoke and then Lawson began by remarking that he was glad he was getting out of the Dead Man's Gulch region, for he had not had a bit of luck since he came into the country.

Then, in a dexterous way, he endeavored to ascertain whether we had struck it rich in the Gulch.

Of course I was satisfied that the driver had told him all that he knew about us, but as that worthy was not aware of the streak of luck which had "come my way," it was not possible for him to do anything more than guess at whether I had been successful or not.

I answered in an evasive manner; said I had no reason to complain, but did not think much of the town as a dwelling-place and so was glad to get out of it.

Finding that I was not inclined to be communicative the sport gave up the attempt to "pump" me, and the conversation finally turned to the subject of road-agents.

The sport told a dozen different stories illustrative of the way in which these outlaws operated, for as he explained he was well qualified to report upon the matter as he had the misfortune to make the acquaintance of some of the most notorious men in the line who had operated in the West.

"I cannot say that I ever lost much wealth," Lawson said in conclusion. "For every time that I happened to be held up by these self-constituted toll collectors I chanced to be playing in bad luck as it happened and so I had very little money to lose."

"I do not suppose there is any danger of our being stopped to-day," Mrs. Lawson remarked, in a careless way.

"Well, no; I do not think there is much probability of our being interfered with," the sport replied, in a reflective way.

"It is some time since there has been any trouble on this route, but there was a fellow called Black Bert who used to make it lively for the passengers on this line once in awhile."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of the man," I observed. "And according to all accounts he is a bold and desperate fellow."

"Yes, yes; he certainly carried matters with a high hand," the sport affirmed.

"But one thing about these attacks I never understood—of course, as I am a stranger to this part of the country and never happened to encounter one of these road-agents, I haven't a very clear idea of how they do business. But as I commenced to say, I don't see how two or three fellows manage to hold up a stage full of well-armed men."

"Now take us, for instance," I continued, directing the conversation into this channel for the express purpose of seeing what the sport would say.

"Here we are three men, provided with good weapons, and we ought to be able, with the protection afforded by the coach, to give a good fight to six or eight desperadoes."

My words immediately made the sport nervous.

"Ah, my dear sir, it is plain that you do not know much about the way these road-agents do business, or you would never talk like this," he declared.

"In the first place, the outlaws arrange their attack in such a way that it is not possible for the men in the coach to offer resistance without exposing themselves to certain death," the sport continued.

"I don't pretend to be a great warrior, but I have always been able to hold my own," he added. "Yet, when it comes to trying to get my revolver out while a couple of road agents are covering me with double-barreled shot-guns or Winchester rifles, I don't want any of it in mine, thank you."

And the sport wound up the speech with an expressive grimace.

"Well, under such circumstances as that, I don't suppose that a man could make a fight," I replied.

"That is the way they work the game, every time," the sport declared. "And I am free to say, my dear sir, that, as far as I am concerned, I would very much prefer to give up a few dollars than to risk my life by attempting to beat off a gang of these marauders."

"Of course, if a man was carrying a great deal of money—if he had his fortune with him, which he had toiled hard to win, then I can understand why he should make a desperate effort to prevent it from being taken from him."

And as he uttered the remarks the sport cast a sly glance at me, as though anxious to see what impression the speech produced upon me.

I laughed outright, somewhat to his surprise. "Well, as far as I am concerned I most assuredly wouldn't risk my life for the money I now have in my pocket," I declared.

"And to my thinking a man must be decidedly foolish to make a journey like this with any

amount of wealth upon his person. It appears to me like a sheer tempting of Providence."

"If any road-agent goes for me you kin bet your life that w'at he gits won't keep him out of the poor-house for long!" the Spider declared with a grin.

"Well, I must admit that my wallet has a lean and bony look," the sport observed.

"But I had no idea that you two gentlemen were as badly off."

"We are anything but flush," I replied. "And if we don't strike pay-dirt soon we will be in a bad way."

"Throw up your hands!" cried a stern voice. The coach came to a sudden halt.

CHAPTER XVII.

BLACK BERT.

DESPITE my avowal that I would not be inclined to offer resistance in the event of an attack, yet when the "slogan" of the road-agents fell on my ears I reached for my revolver in haste as I looked out of the window.

The Spider acted in a similar manner, while the sport lay back in his seat and cried out in alarm:

"You are very foolish to feel for your weapons, gentlemen, unless you are anxious to get us all killed!"

And when I looked out of the window I saw at a glance that Lawson was right in his statement, that the road-agents usually arranged their attacks in such a way that the passengers stood no chance for their lives if they attempted to resist.

A man on foot, dressed in the usual rough clothes common to the region, with high boots, the spurs of which seemed to indicate that he had but lately dismounted, and with his face concealed by a black mask, had stepped out of a clump of pines by the side of the road, not over five paces away, and, with a rifle leveled full at the coach, presented a decidedly disagreeable sight.

On the other side of the stage was a second man, dressed and armed exactly like the first, while fifty feet ahead, in the woods, was a third man, got up in the same fashion, but mounted on a mettlesome steed.

This was evidently the road-agent leader, for it was he who had halted the stage, and commanded the driver to throw up his hands.

From the fact, too, that a bushy, black beard covered his chin, escaping from under the mask, the presumption was strong that this was the outlaw chief, Black Bert, in person.

"Don't you reach for to pull no we'pons, unless you want to git plunzed for keeps!" the road-agent on my side of the coach exclaimed as I stuck my head out of the window.

The fellow on the other side addressed a similar warning to the Spider.

Lawson was alarmed, and hastily spoke:

"My dear sirs, do not be hasty in opening fire, I beg of you!" he cried.

"These two gentlemen are strangers to this part of the country, and as this is the first time they ever chanced to meet with any of you gentlemen of the road they do not know exactly how to behave, but I am sure neither one of them is anxious to get his ticket for the happy hunting-ground at present, so I must request you to go slow, and then, too, there is a lady in the coach."

At this point the horseman spoke.

"What is the matter down there?" he asked, in a sharp, impatient way.

"Surely, none of the pilgrims are going to be foolish enough to show fight?" he continued.

"Unless they are anxious to be put in a condition to be planted without any ceremony, they will not try any game of that kind."

"Tell them who I am, Long Jack," he commanded, in a loud and arrogant way.

"Tell them that Black Bert, the King of the Road, has come to collect his toll, and the man who refuses to pay dies on the spot—dies the death of a dog, and we leave him for the mountain-wolves to feed upon!"

"Oh, that is all right, Bert," the driver responded. "Everything is all right. The passengers in the hearse have too blamed much good sense for to try to play any roots on a man who means business every time, same as you do."

Then the driver addressed us:

"I say, gents, the toll-collectors have come, and as that ain't ary bit of use kicking up any row 'bout the matter, unless some on you are anxious for a chance to git filled full of holes, you had better all git ready to step up to the captain's office and settle."

"It is all right, Jack," Lawson declared. "There isn't any one here who is foolish enough to attempt to resist."

"That is correct, isn't it, gentlemen?" he exclaimed, appealing to us.

Of course, under the circumstances, to attempt to fight would have been the height of folly, particularly as we had made our preparations so that we had but little to lose.

So I said:

"You are correct, Mr. Lawson; we haven't any intention of attempting to resist, for we are

not anxious to make our exit from the world at present."

"That is where your bead is level," the sport exclaimed, in tones which betrayed decided satisfaction.

Then he called out to the driver:

"Tell the gentleman, Long Jack, that none of us has any idea of making any trouble particularly as we have a lady in the coach."

The driver delivered the message to the road-agent chief.

"Very good!" he exclaimed.

"I am glad to learn that you passengers are inclined to take a sensible view of the matter," he continued.

"Little affairs of this kind will happen every now and then, and the wise man always makes up his mind to get through with as little trouble as possible."

"And as for the lady, I hope she will not be at all alarmed, for she will be treated with the utmost consideration and politeness."

"Black Bert always allows ladies to pass free over any road which he controls."

"I am not afraid," Mrs. Lawson remarked.

I suppose we looked at her with inquiring eyes, so she felt impelled to answer.

The road-agent chief now rode up to the coach and looked in through the window by which I sat.

As it was rather warm we had the windows down, so he was able to get a good view of the interior of the coach.

The first one to come under his observation was the sport.

"Hello! why, Doc Lawson, are you in the hearse?" he asked in a tone of surprise, and speaking as though the sport was an old acquaintance.

"Oh, yes; I am here," Lawson replied, attempting to put a cheerful face on the matter.

"Well, well, I am glad to see you!" Black Bert declared.

"I suppose I ought to be polite enough to return the compliment, but I cannot do it and speak the truth, for I am so deucedly bad off for money just now that a toll-gatherer is about the last man that I want to meet," the sport replied.

The road-agent chief laughed.

"Oh, well, these little accidents will happen once in awhile," he remarked. "And you are too old a sport not to accept the situation with the calmness of a philosopher."

"Yes, I generally take whatever comes with as good a grace as possible," Lawson remarked with an air of resignation.

"Then you know, too, that as turn about is fair play it is only right that I should get a kick at you, for I had the misfortune to buck against your game one night when you were running a place in Catfish City, and at the end of an hour or so I got up from the table much poorer than when I sat down," the outlaw chief explained.

"You have the advantage of me, you see," the sport remarked. "For although you are evidently acquainted with me yet it would be difficult for me to identify you."

"Oh, yes, that is true enough!" Black Bert responded.

"You can bet your bottom dollar that I did not walk into your gambling shebang rigged out as I am to-day."

"No, I should say not," the sport affirmed.

"I reckon it would have caused a deal of excitement if I had, and the chances are big, that some of the Catfish City men would have gone for me with a gun in an endeavor to earn the reward which I understand my friend, his high and mighty excellency the governor of the Territory, has been kind enough to offer for my apprehension, dead or alive," and then the outlaw chief gave utterance to a scornful laugh.

"Yes, I reckon with all your nerve, Bert, that a game of that kind would be a little too big for you to handle," the sport remarked.

"You are right, Lawson, for a thousand ducats!" Black Bert declared with a loud laugh.

"I would be apt to consider an ante of that kind a little too steep to allow me to come into the game."

"Oh, no; when I visit the haunts of civilization, I dress like the rest of the world, and am as mild-mannered a man as ever cut a throat or scuttled a ship, as the saying is."

"Are you bound for Catfish City?" the outlaw asked, abruptly.

"I am," Lawson replied.

"Going to open a game there?"

"Not right away, for I havn't the money to back a speculation of that kind."

"You will probably get a situation, then, to deal faro for some of the games now running in that lively burg?"

"Very likely," Lawson answered. "I have got to do something of that sort, for I am about down to the bed-rock."

"I will make it a point to call on you and risk a few stakes as soon as you get settled," the outlaw remarked, in a patronizing way.

"You will not have any trouble in recognizing me the next time I chip into your game, for you will know me by my beard! Ho, ho, ho!"

And then Black Bert laughed loud and long.

The other road-agents joined in the merriment.

ment in such an extremely hearty way that it was plain they considered that their leader had given utterance to an extremely good joke.

I judged from this that the beard was a false one, worn for a disguise.

"Oh, I am too much of a gentleman to give the thing away, even if I did recognize you," the sport responded.

"Well, Doc, I don't doubt that that is the truth, although there isn't many men who would not be glad to get a crack at me if I had ever gone through them on the road; that is, if they thought there was a good chance for them to call the turn."

Then, with a polite bow to the lady, he continued:

"This is Mrs. Lawson, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"I am glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, madam, and I trust you will not allow yourself to be alarmed by this little accident, as there is not the slightest danger of your being disturbed in any way."

"I am very much obliged indeed, sir, for the assurance," the lady replied.

"Don't mention it, madam, I beg," Black Bert remarked, with a polite bow.

And then the outlaw chief cast his eyes on me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE OUTLAW'S POWER.

"I DON'T think I have ever had the pleasure of seeing you before," Black Bert remarked.

"Not to my knowledge," I replied. "Still, as I am not able to get a view of your face, I cannot be certain about the matter."

"I can satisfy your mind in regard to that point," the outlaw chief replied, shortly.

"This is the first time that we have ever met.

Then he fixed his eyes on my companion.

"Hello, Spider, how do you find yourself?" he exclaimed.

Joe did not seem to be at all surprised at being thus accosted.

"I am not doing any grumbling jest now," he replied.

"I am able to be up and around, and git away with my three squar' meals a day, when I am lucky enough to git 'em," he added, with a grin.

"I don't doubt it!" the outlaw chief exclaimed. "Well, Spider, I am glad to meet you, and I don't mind saying that I have been... 'tis I would run across you on the road for so long time."

There's an old saying, you know, that if a man waits long enough almost everything is bound to happen to him," Joe remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"Ah, yes, I think I have heard that before," the outlaw chief remarked.

"Well, Spider, I suppose you are a little curious as to why I was anxious to meet you."

"You wanted to clean me out of my rocks, I reckon, 'cos that is the game that ducks of your kind generally play," my companion replied in the bluntest kind of way.

"Your words go as straight to the mark as your fists usually do," Black Bert observed.

"But the reason why I wanted to meet you was so you would have an opportunity to square up a little debt which you owe me."

"Owe nothing!" Joe declared. "I don't owe you a cent! How could I? I never run across you afore!"

"That may be, but I have run across you, and to my sorrow," the road-agent chief retorted.

"Go long! now you are trying to stuff me, but it won't work!" the Spider asserted.

"Oh, no, honest Injun!" Black Bert replied.

"When you were matched to fight the Englishman I was fool enough to believe the yarns they told about his being a man-killer, and so I put a hundred dollars on him."

"Wal he git'n you a fight for your money and did the best he knew how," Joe retorted.

"And if you was donkey enough to believe that a man of forty odd, with a stomach on him like an alderman, stood any chance ag'in' a young chap of twenty-five, who took such good care of himself as to be able to fight a battle right off of his beer at any time, you ought to have lost your coin."

"Oh, yes, Spider, I admit that I made a great mistake about the matter, but that don't prevent me from being glad to get a chance to take a few ducats out of you, so as to help square me up a little," Black Bert observed.

"Well, pard, you are dead right on one thing, and that is, the ducats you git out of me will be few, and no mistake!" Joe asserted, with a grin.

"Is it possible?" the outlaw chief exclaimed, pretending to be deeply concerned.

"Well, now, I must remark that I am truly desolated, as a Frenchman would say."

"You are playing in bad luck too, then, just the same as Doc Lawson here!"

"I ain't struck a good stake for a month of Sunday!" the Spider declared.

"Is that so? and a month of Sundays is a deal of time too," Black Bert responded, in a reflective way.

"Well, well, I must say that it is really too

bad, and I am grieved to the soul," said the outlaw chief shook his head in a mournful way.

Then he turned his eyes upon me.

"I trust you are able to make a better report," he said in an insinuating manner.

"You surely can afford to do something for the benefit of the toll-gatherers."

"I am afraid that the way I pan out will be as great a disappointment to you as the statements of my companions here have been," I replied.

"A most astonishing circumstance!" the outlaw chief declared with a shake of his head.

"The idea that three such good-looking chaps as you are should be playing in bad luck at this particular moment."

"Really, it quite distresses me," he added. "But there is a chance, you know, that things are really better than you imagine them to be," Black Bert continued in a decidedly sarcastic way.

"I have known travelers to make mistakes of this kind—to imagine, you understand, that they had very little money when I questioned them in regard to their funds, and then, after a careful examination was made, they were really surprised to discover how much better off they were than they had supposed.

"Some men are so forgetful about little matters of this kind, you comprehend."

"But we have done talking enough, and now we will come right down to business!" the road-agent chief exclaimed, abruptly.

"I shall have to trouble you gentlemen to get out of the stage by this right-hand door, one by one, and as soon as you reach the ground you will have the politeness to deposit all your weapons, and all your valuables, on the earth, each man putting his things in a separate place from the others so I will be able to see what each gentleman contributes."

"Of course, gentlemen, I trust you understand that my pards here with the rifles, are dead-shots, and noted for being remarkably quick on the trigger, so that if any one of you should be foolish enough to imagine he could make anything by showing fight his blood will be on his own head."

"It is my proud boast that I never use violence in collecting my tolls, excepting when I am absolutely forced to such a course by some fool, with more courage than discretion, who, for the sake of saving a few paltry dollars, is willing to risk his life."

"I think I can answer that all three of us here have too much sense to try any game of that kind," Doc Lawson hastened to say.

"We have not money enough to justify us in risking our lives for it," I remarked.

"Nary time!" Joe declared.

"It is your fight, Mr. Man, and we throw up the sponge!"

"Glad to hear it, gentlemen," Black Bert remarked in an extremely affable way.

"I always like to do business with as little trouble as possible."

"Now, gentlemen, I am waiting on you," he continued, briskly.

"Doc Lawson it is your play first!"

"Certainly, certainly!"

Then out got the sport, and when he reached the ground he drew his revolver from its holster produced his wallet, counted out ten dollars, then put the money and the weapon by the side of the coach.

"How much cash, Doc?" the outlaw chief asked.

"Ten dollars only," the sport replied. "I told you I was clean down to the bed-rock, for I have been playing in the worst run of luck that I ever struck for the last month."

"Yes, yes; I heard that things had not been coming your way lately, and I am really sorry for it, for a square sporting man like yourself, Doc, ought to be able to strike it rich all the time."

"Well, the game will run that way once in awhile," the sport suggested.

"You are right, and there isn't any use of a man's fretting about the matter," the road-agent chief observed, with the air of a philosopher.

"A man must brace himself up, put on a heap of style, and try it again."

"Is that all your wealth, Doc?"

"I have a silver watch."

"Oh, that is all right. I am no pawnbroker, and do a strictly cash business."

"See that little clump of cedars over by the rocks?"

And the outlaw chief pointed to a bunch of evergreens a hundred feet or so along the trail in advance of the stage.

The sport nodded.

"If you will have the kindness to waltz over there and take a seat upon one of the boulders while I interview these gentlemen, I will be much obliged."

"Certainly, of course; delighted!"

And with a polite bow the sport started.

"Hold on a moment, Doc; I forgot!" Black Bert declared abruptly.

The sport halted in surprise.

"It goes against my grain to cut a good clean square sport like yourself clear to the bone," the

outlaw chief remarked. "And, since you are playing in such bad luck, I am willing to do what I can to help you along."

"Take half the pile, Doc. I will divvy with you—five for me, and five for you."

"Much obliged!" responded the sport, helping himself to the money.

"And if the opportunity ever comes in my way, I will do as much for you," Doc Lawson continued.

"On, that is all right," the outlaw chief claimed, carelessly.

"The next time I take a seat at your table when you get your legs under the green cloth, give me a square deal for my money."

"Oh, yes; you can depend upon that," Doc Lawson asserted.

Then he marched off and took a seat on one of the boulders which cropped out of the earth in the shade of the cedars.

"You see, gentlemen, I am not disposed to be a hog," Black Bert remarked.

"I know that the doctor is as square a sport as ever flipped a card west of the old Mississippi, and so when I, in the course of business, run against a man like that I am disposed to do all I can for him," he continued.

"The doctor is to be congratulated upon his good fortune," I remarked. "And the circumstance shows how good it is sometimes for a man to have a fine reputation."

"Oh, yes; if the Doc had been a common, ordinary sport of the shark or wolf breed, I would have skinned him without mercy," Black Bert declared.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SURPRISE.

"Now, Spider Joe, the court will hear from you!" the outlaw chief commanded.

I was not prepared for this, for I expected to be the next one summoned; but I did not make any remark, and Joe descended from the stage.

The Spider had a pair of revolvers and a Bowie-knife which he deposited upon the ground.

Then he pulled out the buckskin bag which contained his money and offered it to the road-agent.

"How much have you got in there?" Black Bert demanded.

"Blamed if I know."

"Suppose you count your wealth."

The Spider did so, then announced the result:

"Fifteen dollars and a half!" the road-agent chief exclaimed, angrily.

"Well, well! that is a nice rake to offer a man like myself, I must say," he continued.

"Oh, well, if you don't want it, I can find a good use for it myself," my companion retorted.

"Ah, yes; but I recollect you must have made some mistake about the matter," Black Bert declared in a decidedly ugly way. "You have more money than that, but you are not willing to fork it over."

"All right, you are welcome to think so if you like," the spider declared.

"You must not imagine that you can fool me with any gum-game!" the outlaw chief exclaimed.

"Oh, go 'long with you!" Joe responded, defiantly. "Who is trying to fool you? That is just what I want to know."

"You are; but you will find that you are not smart enough to do it," the road-agent leader declared.

"If you don't believe what I say, set one of your imps to searching me and see if he kin diskin' anything!" the Spider replied, in an indignant way.

"Well, I don't take any stock in your statement," Black Bert retorted. "And I will do you the honor to search you myself!"

"It don't make a bit of difference who does the searching," the Spider declared. "If you kin find any more coin on me I will be willing to eat the brass, blame me if I won't!"

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that," the outlaw chief replied. "You think, no doubt, that you are playing an extremely sharp game when you make a statement of that kind, but I am up to all sorts of tricks and dodges.

"You, probably, haven't got any coin bidden away, but I think the chances are good that you have some bills stowed in a safe place, and if I don't succeed in finding them it will be because you are a blamed sight smarter than I think you are!" the road-agent leader announced in a very ugly way.

"You are welcome to try the game as far as I am concerned!" the Spider declared, stoutly.

"I will, and speedily too!" Black Bert cried.

"Number One, you come with me, and keep your eyes on this fellow while I go through him. Number Two, guard the stage, and be sure to mind what you are about!"

"I think you are trying to play some roots on me, and you will find that I am an awful tough customer if you attempt to stroke my hair the wrong way!"

"Come on, Spider, and don't you dare to attempt to run any game on me, for if I catch you at anything of the kind it will be as much as your life is worth!" Black Bert threatened.

"Ah, go along with you—do you think you kin scare the life out of me with any two-cent bluff of this kind?" the Spider retorted.

"I have met a heap of men afore I run across you, and this isn't the first time that I have been in a tight place by a jugful."

"It is your little game, of course, to skin me as clean as you kin, and I would be a fool not to try for to do the best I kin for myself, but I reckon you must think I have been striking a heap of luck lately by the way you talk; mebbe I have, but I ain't aware of the fact, for it 'pears to me that it has been as much as I could do to git along."

"We will soon settle the matter!" the road-agent replied, shortly.

"But I must remark that if ten or fifteen dollars apiece is all you pilgrims are going to pan out, the toll-collectors on this road will not get rich, unless they strike wealthier gangs."

"If the thing ain't paying you I would throw up the job," the Spider remarked, with a grin.

"When I want your advice I will ask you for it!" Black Bert retorted.

"Come along! and I will soon see whether you are trying to fool me or not."

Then the road-agent marched Joe away, and took shelter behind a clump of evergreens. Mrs. Lawson watched them with curious eyes until they disappeared, then she turned to me and said:

"If your friend has any money I hope he has concealed it so carefully that the villains will be baffled, for according to all the reports this outlaw is an ugly customer when he becomes angry. And if he finds that the man is trying to deceive him he may take it into his head to resort to some unpleasant measures."

"The gentleman is inclined to be unreasonable, I fancy," was my reply.

"Since I have been acquainted with the Spider, I have not known him to make any big strikes," I continued. "And men of his class are not usually overburdened with wealth. Then, too, if he had been making money in Dead Man's Gulch, the chances are that he would have stayed there."

I saw that my words had made an impression on the woman, for she shook her head in a doubtful way and remarked:

"Yes, fellows like the Spider don't, as a rule, take much care of money, even if they are lucky enough to make a big strike."

"I don't doubt that this road-agent will be disappointed in the amount of wealth that I will shell out," I observed. "But he might know that if a man had any sense he would not be fool enough to carry any large amount of money with him on a journey of this kind, where he is liable to be robbed at any moment."

"Very true; but some men are careless in regard to a matter of this kind," Mrs. Lawson observed.

"This small amount of booty will be quite a disappointment to your husband," I remarked, in a cautious way.

"He consented to aid the road-agents because his long run of bad luck had made him desperate, and it will be no wonder if he should feel a little down in the mouth upon making the discovery that his association with the rascals is not going to be productive of much profit as far as this trip was concerned."

She nodded assent.

In about ten minutes the road-agents and Joe made their appearance from behind the evergreens, and from the broad smile which shone on the Spider's face it was evident that the outlaws had not succeeded in discovering anything.

Black Bert directed Joe to join Lawson, and as the Spider marched off, the outlaw chief came up to the coach.

"So far you pilgrims have turned out to be the poorest crowd that I have struck for a dog's age!" Black Bert declared, in a disgusted way. "But I suppose you are carrying the wealth of the party," he added.

"You are making a big mistake in supposing anything of the kind," I replied, immediately. "I have got a few dollars in my pocket—enough to keep me for a couple of weeks, perhaps, in Catfish City, so as to give me a chance to strike something. If I had been making money in Dead Man's Gulch, I would have remained there."

"Well, get out and shuck yourself of your weapons and your wealth!" Black Bert commanded, evidently in a bad humor.

I descended from the coach, gave up my revolver and then handed over the buckskin bag which contained my money.

"Empty the stuff on the ground and count it," said the outlaw chief, handing the bag to the rascal whom he had designated as Number One.

The man obeyed.

"Twenty dollars and a quarter!" he announced, after completing the count.

"About forty dollars all told!" Black Bert exclaimed in a tone which plainly showed how disappointed he was at the smallness of the booty.

"Well, well, this is about the poorest haul that I ever made," the outlaw chief continued.

"Hardly enough to pay for the wear and tear of horse-flesh," he added.

"Yes, but you must not expect to keno every time, you know," I remarked. "You must be content to take the bad with the good."

"That is all right, but it has been about all bad lately, and if it keeps on, I think I shall have to advertise this route for sale for it will not pay me to carry it on," the outlaw chief remarked with a grim attempt at humor.

"Well, I suppose I will have to try and see if you have any wealth concealed in your clothes," he continued. "I don't doubt you are all ready to swear black and white that you have not!"

"Oh, there isn't any use of my saying anything about the matter," I replied.

"Make your examination—search me thoroughly, and then you will be satisfied."

"You are right, talk is cheap but it takes money to buy land!"

"Come on, then!" Black Bert commanded.

I went with the road-agents, they conducted me to the shelter of the evergreens, and there they searched me in the most careful manner, but neither one of the two were smart enough to think of examining my hat, and so they did not succeed in discovering the hidden money.

"You fellows ought to be ashamed of yourselves to come on the road with so little money to pay your tolls," Black Bert declared.

"Maybe the next coachful will pan out better," I suggested.

"Well, business has got to pick up or I shall have to quit," the outlaw declared.

"There are three of us who have got to get a living out of this thing, and we must strike it better than this or we'll all starve."

Then we came from behind the evergreens and, to my surprise, the coach was gone.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ROAD-AGENTS' GAME.

WHEN the outlaw beheld the look of surprise on my face he burst into a loud laugh.

"You don't see the hearse, hey?"

"No, I do not," I replied, as I gazed up the trail.

The spot which the road-agents had selected for their ambush was in the midst of a broken and irregular bit of country, and as, owing to the nature of the ground, I could only get a view of the trail for a few hundred yards, it was not surprising that I could not see the coach if it had gone on its way, for a couple of minutes' drive would remove it from sight.

"You see, young man, I have taken quite a fancy to you, and so I made up my mind to enjoy the pleasure of your company for awhile," the road-agent remarked in a bantering way.

"I am sorry to say that I am not able to appreciate the honor," I replied. "For I presume it means that after you have concluded you have enjoyed my society long enough, I shall have to walk to Catfish City, and I must admit that I am not particularly fond of pedestrian exercise."

"Well, I reckon you are in for a little walking; but that isn't the worst of it," the outlaw remarked, with a clearly perceptible sneer.

"Are you not satisfied with what you have got?" I asked. "It seems to me that after you go through a man and relieve him of all his wealth, you might be content."

"Under ordinary circumstances I might be, but I have got an idea in my head that you have succeeded in playing a pretty sharp game on me, and I want to see if I can't get even with you in some way."

"Why, what game have I played?" I asked.

"I suppose you think that I don't know anything about you?" the outlaw retorted.

"Well, really, I have never given a thought to the matter," was my reply.

"I want you to understand that I am no common rascal who has taken to the road just because I am broke and want a stake which I expect to get out of the first coach I hold up; but on the contrary, I am running this thing just as if it was a regular business, according to a system, you comprehend, and that is the reason why I have been so successful as to induce the Governor of this Territory to offer a reward of a thousand dollars for my capture, alive or dead."

"You perceive there isn't any personal malice in it," the outlaw chief continued with a sarcastic smile. "For my esteemed friend, the governor, is willing to give just as much for me dead as alive."

"All he is anxious for is to get me out of the way, and he is willing to give a cool thousand dollars to any one who is keen enough to do the job."

"There have been half a dozen smart Alecks who tried to earn the money, but none of them has succeeded in doing it yet."

"But, to come back to my mutton: I want you to understand that I am a first-class toll-collector, and I always make it a point to be well-informed concerning the people who use my road."

"You think, I suppose, that I don't know anything about you?"

"Well, I imagine that I am a stranger to you, as I certainly am this section of country," I replied.

"Your name is Robert James, and you are a detective from New York!" the road-agent exclaimed, abruptly.

"It is true that I go by the name of Robert James, but the detective business is a little yarn got up on the spur of the moment when the trouble with the gamblers occurred in Dead Man's Gulch."

"Oh, yes, that is a good way for you to get out of it!" the road-agent sneered. "But you cannot pull the wool over my eyes! I reckon that your name isn't Robert James, but that is neither here nor there; in this Western country it is the height of impoliteness to express a doubt in regard to a man's name."

"That you are a detective from the East I believe," the outlaw chief continued, in a very positive way.

"And you have come out West here in search of some man who has skipped from the East. The Spider has come with you as a sort of guide."

"You did not find your prey in Dead Man's Gulch, and now you intend to try some other place, but I am going to take a hand in the game."

"It is my impression that you are a man who amounts to something, and it is my intention to take you to my little den in the mountains and keep you there until your friends in the East pony up a good fat ransom for you."

The cat was out of the bag now with a vengeance, but notwithstanding the serious nature of my position I could not help laughing at the ridiculous mistake that the outlaw chief had made in regard to the matter.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked, in surprise.

"I cannot help it when I reflect how far you are away from the truth," I replied.

"Oh, I am not correct in my surmise?" he exclaimed, in an angry way.

"Oh, no, you are away off," I responded. "In regard to my name we will let that go, for, as you justly remarked, names don't amount to anything in the West. A man's name is what he chooses to call himself, and no one has any right to dispute about it; but as to my being a detective officer, or that there is any one in the East who would be willing to give anything for my ransom, is all nonsense."

"You might hold me here for a hundred years and you wouldn't find anybody willing to come forward and put up a cent for me!"

The earnest declaration rather bothered the road-agent chief, for he shook his head in a doubtful way, then remarked:

"Of course it is your game to try and make me believe that there isn't any money in the thing for me."

"Try it on and then you will be satisfied," I responded.

"Now, then, to tell you the exact truth: I was forced to get out of the East on account of having got into trouble there," I continued. "Not anything particularly serious, but enough to make it desirable for me to get out."

"A certain able and unscrupulous foe contrived to get me in a tight place; of course, I contend that I never did anything wrong, but the circumstances were such that I considered it wiser for me to get out than to attempt to fight, and so I came West."

"I made the Spider's acquaintance in Denver, and as he knew the country while I didn't, I accepted his invitation to try my luck with him, and there is my story in a nutshell."

I could see from the look in the eyes of the outlaw chief that I had considerably shaken his belief that I was an important captive.

"Well, it may be that you are giving it to me all straight," he remarked, slowly. "But I have only got your word for it, you know, and if you were a man worth a million you would be apt to put on a poor mouth in order to fool me."

"Yes, that is true, of course, but I really am telling you the exact facts of the case."

"Maybe so, but I reckon I will hold on to you for a few days, and perhaps through the aid of some friends of mine I may be able to find out whether you are telling me the truth or not."

"All right," I replied. "I am in your power and, therefore, will be obliged to submit."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the appearance of the two road-agents.

Both were mounted, and each one led a spare horse.

The sight of the extra horse, which had evidently been provided for my accommodation, convinced me that Black Bert had made up his mind before he attacked the stage that he would retain me for a ransom.

"Now, then, friend James, mount your steed and we will be off!" the outlaw captain exclaimed.

"We have an hour's ride before my den up in the mountains will be reached, and so the quicker we are off the better."

Black Bert indicated the horse which I was to mount, and soon I was in the saddle.

My steed was a sorry-looking "claybank" colored brute, and, to judge from his appearance, a sharp hour's gallop would be the death of him.

All three of the road-agents, though, had excellent horses.

Black Bert evidently noticed that I was not

favorably impressed by the brute, for he called out:

"James, if you are not a good rider you need not be afraid of that horse running away with you, for I can safely recommend him as being perfectly gentle," then all the outlaws laughed, as though they thought the remark was an excessively funny one.

"The poor brute hasn't got spirit enough to be anything but gentle," I replied.

"You spoke about an hour's ride," I continued. "It may be that this horse is like a singed cat, a great deal better than he looks, but, really, to judge from his appearance, a six or eight mile gallop would be the death of him."

"Well, I didn't know just how good a rider you were, you know, and so I did not think it would be safe to provide a spirited or mettlesome animal," Black Bert explained.

"And then, too, if I had provided you with a good horse, you might be foolish enough to attempt to escape from us on the road, and put us to the trouble of chasing you; but I know there isn't any danger of your attempting anything of the kind now."

And then again the outlaws laughed.

"You are right there isn't much danger of anybody trying to escape by flight who is unlucky enough to be mounted on this horse," I remarked.

"It is my opinion that if I tried to make him go at a good rate of speed he would be apt to fall and break his neck," I continued.

This frank expression of my opinion of the horse produced another burst of laughter.

"Oh, no; he is not as bad as all that," Black Bert declared. "He is far better than he looks; but come; we must be off!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOYS IN BLUE.

"I WILL take the advance," the chief of the outlaws said. "You, James, follow after me, and the others will bring up the rear."

Then Black Bert tightened his rein, and his mettlesome steed, obedient to the pressure, started. I rode after him, and the two road-agents followed me.

If any vague hopes of escaping from the trap into which I had fallen had entered my mind when I found I was to ride, they would speedily have been dissipated after we started on the trip, for the outlaw chief had arranged the matter so there was no possible chance for me to even make an attempt to escape, unless I wanted to rush to certain death.

On we rode for a hundred yards, following the trail, and then, as we turned a bend, we came face to face with a squad of cavalry not a hundred yards away!

The Boys in Blue were led by a lieutenant, and by his side rode my comrade, the Spider.

Immediately I understood what had occurred.

The squad of cavalry, coming along the trail, encountered the stage-coach; Joe had related to the officer what had occurred, and the lieutenant instantly comprehended that if he acted promptly there was a good chance for him to capture the outlaws.

Joe had volunteered to act as guide, and the soldiers had advanced so quickly and so quietly as to take the road-agents completely by surprise.

"Surrender!" cried the lieutenant, putting spurs to his horse, an example followed immediately by his soldiers, and on they came, pell-mell.

Fierce oaths escaped from the lips of the surprised outlaws, then in hot haste they wheeled their horses around and fled in wild confusion, totally ignoring me, their prisoner.

I pulled my horse to one side of the trail, so as to allow room for the troopers to pass, and the Boys in Blue rode by me at the top of their horses' speed.

In obedience to the lieutenant's command the troopers unslung their carbines and as the road-agents did not halt the soldiers opened fire.

It was the lieutenant's desire to capture the outlaws alive, and so before he ordered his men to open fire he was careful to caution them to aim at the horses.

Sharply rung out the shots on the clear mountain air.

As it happened, the soldiers were a picked squad of old Indian-fighters; all were good marksmen, and as the outlaws were well within range the troopers' bullets did not miss the mark.

As the soldiers swept by me in the pursuit the Spider drew rein and rode up to my side.

"Them fellers are going to have a mighty narrow squeeze of it!" Joe cried.

"They might as well surrender, for they do not stand any chance to escape," I remarked.

"Nary time!" the Spider exclaimed, emphatically.

"And if they ain't blanked keefal the hull lot of 'em will git wiped right off the face of the earth!"

"That is certainly true!" I declared.

Just then the soldiers began firing.

The first ten shots did the business.

All three of the road-agents' horses went down, and apparently one of the outlaws was killed, for he pitched off the horse as it fell, and lay motionless by the side of the road.

The other two, Black Bert, and the tall fellow, whom he had called Number One, apparently had not been wounded, for when their horses fell they jumped nimbly to the ground and dashed up on the hillside.

"By jinks! the blamed cusses are going to git off arter all!" Joe cried, as we rode on down the trail, eager to get the best view of the exciting scene.

The country through which the trail ran was so broken and irregular that it would be a clear impossibility for horsemen to pursue a fugitive who was on foot amid the rocks.

But fortune was against the outlaws.

As it happened, there was a range of high cliffs, so steep that nothing but a mountain goat could hope to climb them, which, starting from the trail just above the bend, where the outlaws had first caught sight of the soldiers, bent around in a semicircle to the trail again, and in this scant area of ground the road-agents had taken refuge.

The lieutenant was an old and experienced soldier, and his quick eyes at once noticed that by covering the trail with his men from the beginning of the rocky range to the end where it came again to the road it would not be possible for the fugitives to escape.

And although the half-moon-shaped piece of ground to which the outlaws had fled, was broken and irregular, yet there was no good shelter for them excepting at one point, right in against the cliff, where a clump of junipers threw their spiny branches to the breeze.

By the side of the trail though there was plenty of cover for the soldiers so they had by far the best of the position.

The fugitives' refuge was just outside of rifle-range, so that as long as the soldiers kept by the trail neither party could damage the other.

The lieutenant had just finished posting his men, and, shielded by a friendly clump of evergreens, was peering through the branches at the outlaws in their covert, when the Spider and I rode up.

"You came in the nick of time," I remarked, after greeting the officer.

"Yes, so it seems," the lieutenant replied. "It was a lucky chance for you, and it is going to be a lucky chance for me, for I understand that this is the notorious Black Bert, and as there is a thousand dollars offered for the capture of the man, alive or dead, I think the odds are big that the governor will be called upon to pay that money before he is a day older."

"You certainly seem to have the man in a corner."

"Oh, yes, blamed if he ain't got him as snug as a bug in a rug!" the Spider declared.

"Oh, yes, he is in a trap fast enough," the lieutenant remarked, with a deal of satisfaction. "The man cannot possibly get out, for we have him completely hemmed in."

"If you attempt to close in on him, though, I reckon the pair of them will give you a bloody fight," Joe remarked, with a grave shake of the head.

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt about that, I think, from what I know of the man," the soldier observed. "He is a reckless devil and has given proof in half a dozen fights that he sets but little value on his life, but on this occasion I am not going to give him a chance to fight—that is, on his own ground," the lieutenant added.

"He most certainly occupies a strong position," I remarked.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that," the officer replied. "He is pretty well protected, and if we should attempt to drive him out, although there isn't much doubt but that we would clean out the pair in the end, yet it is probable we would lose half a dozen men in the fight."

"It seems a shame to run such a risk," I remarked.

"Oh, I do not intend to do anything of the kind," the lieutenant replied, immediately. "I have got the fellows in a trap; we would be apt to suffer severely if we moved in to drive them out, and they will be in exactly the same box if they attempt to get out."

"Yes, yes, that is certainly true," I observed.

"I do not doubt that these fellows are pluming themselves on their smartness in getting into this cover, but before they get through with the proceedings I think they will come to the conclusion that they have made the biggest kind of a mistake," the lieutenant declared.

"You do not propose to attack them, then?" I questioned.

"No, I am satisfied with the way matters are situated now," the officer replied, with a smile.

"I think that we are far more comfortably situated than they are," he continued. "We have two days' rations with us, and there is an abundance of water in the little streamlet yonder, so that we will not suffer for either food or drink."

"Ah, yes, I see; and the chances are that these unfortunate wretches haven't a mouthful to eat," I observed.

"The absence of water is what is going to worry them more than anything else," the lieutenant argued.

"A man can fast very well for a day or two, but when it comes to going without water it takes an extra good man to stand it," the officer declared.

"Another point is in our favor, too," he continued.

"There is a full moon to-night, so if the idea came into their heads that they might be able to steal off in the darkness, they are away off, for they can't work any dodge of that kind."

"Circumstances are all against them, and if they are wise they will surrender," I suggested.

"Oh, yes; for if they attempt to break through our line they will be killed to a dead certainty," the lieutenant remarked.

Then an idea occurred to the lieutenant, and he said:

"How would it do for you to go in under a flag of truce and see what they think about the matter?" he asked.

"I am agreeable," was my answer.

"You can set forth the situation just as I have explained it to you," he added.

"All right!"

And so, with a handkerchief tied to a stick, I interviewed the outlaws.

Both the men were pretty well disgusted, and after a little talk they agreed to surrender.

They came forth, and we all departed for Catfish City in company.

Both of the men were tried, convicted, and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment; we did not wait for the trial though, for there were plenty of witnesses besides Joe and myself, but hurried on our way East as fast as possible.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN IMPORTANT WITNESS.

As soon as we arrived at Denver City, we changed our gold for drafts on New York, taking the precaution to give the banker my signature, Robert James, to forward on to the house in New York, on whom my drafts were drawn, so that I should have no trouble in cashing them, which, as a stranger, I might have.

We arrived at Buffalo, New York, without having anything special to notice on the passage.

My first act, on arriving at Buffalo, was to write to Nell, telling her that I was in town, stopping at the Wadsworth House, and asking her to call upon me. This I posted at once, addressing it, as she had directed me to do, to Miss N. Orange. Of course I had not received any answer to the letter I had written her from "Dead Man's Gulch," as I had come East two days after I had posted it, and had probably arrived in Buffalo almost, if not quite, as soon as the letter.

The letter to Nell posted, Joe and I set out to find the residence of Mr. James R. Watson, the retired grocer. By consulting a Directory, we found that a Mr. James R. Watson lived at No. — Pine street. Joe and I proceeded there at once. We found the gentleman at home. He was a little, short, fat man, with hair and whiskers quite gray. He was much of a gentleman, and upon my informing him that I had some particular business, he invited us at once into his parlor, and requested us to be seated. I went at once to the object of my visit.

"Do you remember Mr. Robert Browning, formerly of Buffalo?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; I remember him very well, although I was not very intimately acquainted with him," replied Mr. Watson.

I could see that he was both surprised and annoyed at my question.

"I bring a message from him, sir."

"Ah! indeed!" and the little fat grocer gave a short, dry cough; "I hope he hasn't got into any more trouble. He created a terrible scandal here in Buffalo. I suppose, as you know him, you also know of the circumstance!"

"Yes, sir," I answered, "but Mr. Browning will never cause any more trouble in this world; he is dead, sir."

"Dead! bless me!" and the little fat man started as though he had received an electric shock; "how did it happen?"

I briefly related the incident of the death of the fugitive minister. Mr. Watson heard me with the greatest attention. When I had finished, he heaved a deep sigh.

"I do not think that Mr. Browning was what could really be called a bad man at heart," he said; "he was a weak man, though, and one easily led into temptation; but I know of a case, gentlemen, wherein he showed himself to be a man possessed of true Christian feelings."

"You refer to his actions in regard to a certain widow and child?" I said.

Again the little man started, and then he looked at me with unbounded astonishment.

"Is it possible," he cried, "that you know about Mrs. Percy and her child?"

This was exactly what I wanted to know; I wanted to find out under what name Mrs. Salome Livingstone was known in Buffalo. I saw now that she had kept her maiden name.

Detective Gordon's Grip.

"Oh, yes!" I said, in reply to his question, "my visit to you has reference to Mrs. Percy and her child, as well as to Mr. Browning. By the way, you were one of the witnesses to Mrs. Percy's marriage, were you not?"

"Yes; I was present at the ceremony," he replied.

"Do you remember the bridegroom?"

"Yes."

"Can you describe his personal appearance?"

"Quite as well as if I had only seen him yesterday. He was a fine young fellow, above the middle height, curly yellow hair, and a peculiar dark-blue eye—"

"A very good description of Anson Livingstone as he looked in 1843," I said, quietly.

"Hullo! Do you know his name?" cried Mr. Watson, in another fit of astonishment.

"Oh, yes! why should any one conceal it?"

"Well, that's exactly what I don't know, only Mrs. Livingstone came to me about a year or so after she was married and begged me never to reveal to any one the fact that I was a witness to her marriage, or the name of her husband. I pitied her, for she seemed in such deep grief, and of course I said I would never mention it. I suspected that her husband had committed some rascality—deserted her or something of that sort, and she didn't want it known."

So far all was well. Browning had spoken the truth. Here was a living witness to prove the legality of the marriage of Salome Percy to Anson Livingstone.

In as few words as possible, then, I explained to Mr. Watson the secret of the mystery that hung over the marriage of Salome Percy. I told him how her husband, Livingstone, had married a second time, and only a year after his first marriage. How his first wife, Salome, had kept his secret, for love of the villain husband that had basely deserted her for another; how the child of Salome Percy—or to give her the name justly due her, the name of her husband, Livingstone—was in reality the true heir to the estate of her father—the estate now held and enjoyed by the children of the second wife; that my mission was, through the courts of justice, to give to the orphan child, Salome, the property justly hers, and that I needed his aid—first, to give me a clew to find the heir, and next, to prove the mother's marriage. The grocer followed me in my story with rapt attention, and, at its close, grasped me by the hand warmly.

"My dear sir, you shall have every assistance in my power!" he cried. "Salome was here in Buffalo, only a few weeks ago. She's a strange, independent sort of creature. She came on from New York, quite suddenly, and went back as suddenly again. My wife says she's sure she's in love with some one in New York, for she used to go to the post-office here every day, as though she was expecting a letter from some one. I don't think she ever got a letter, though, for she always came home again looking very sorrowful."

"Have you her address in New York?" I asked; "for, of course, before I proceed to action, it will be better for me to see the young lady and consult with her on the subject."

"Yes, of course. As I said before, she's a strange creature, for although she might have a good, comfortable home, either here with me in Buffalo, or with the folks she is now stopping with—some distant relations of her mother's—she prefers to go and take a lodgings-room all by herself, and supports herself with her needle."

"A strange fancy, indeed," I said; "at the same time I must confess that I admired her independence."

"Here's the address," he said, taking a card from the mantel piece: "'Miss Salome Percy, No. — West 30th street, New York City.'"

"I shall find her there, then, beyond a doubt," I asked, taking the card.

"Oh, yes!" answered Mr. Watson; "my wife got a letter from her about three days ago."

"Does she know the facts connected with her mother's marriage?" I asked.

"I have a shrewd suspicion that she does, because she has never made any inquiry about her father; and, in fact, whenever she has been at our house, and I have brought up the subject of her mother, she always seemed to avoid speaking of it, as if the matter was distasteful to her. This makes me think that she knows all about it."

"Probably the mother asked her not to reveal anything," I said, "passing the promise she had made to her guilty husband on to her child, and thus keeping her faith, even beyond the grave."

"Yes, that is possibly the truth."

"By the way, you have some papers, Mr. Watson, have you not, that Mr. Browning left in your care?"

"Yes," he answered; "they are up-stairs in my desk."

"I shall probably be obliged to call upon you to produce them shortly; for one of the papers is the marriage-certificate of Mrs. Livingstone."

"I shouldn't be surprised," answered the grocer, "for Browning, when he gave them to me to take care of, hinted that in time they might be of great value."

"That time has come," I replied, "for I shall set out instantly for New York, to hunt up the heir, Salome, the child of Salome; and the moment she is found I shall bring suit against Mr. Richard Livingstone to compel him to give up the property."

"Excuse the question," said the worthy Mr. Watson, after a moment's pause, "but you seem to take a deep interest in this affair. Are you a relative of the Percys?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"Ah!" said Mr. Watson, a little bothered; "a friend of the family, I presume?"

"No, sir; I never even heard of them until my attention was called to this case."

"Oh! then may I ask why you take such an interest in it?"

"Certainly," I replied. "In the first place, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Robert James; my business, detective officer; my residence, New York City."

The little grocer stared at me, open-mouthed.

"Bless me!" he cried; "a detective officer! why, you don't look a bit like a detective officer; that is, I mean my idea of one. I thought they were always great, strapping fellows, with a general expression which said 'fight' about them."

I laughed at the idea—a laugh in which Joe joined, for he, being a fighting-man, enjoyed being taken for a non-combatant.

"Appearances are deceptive, sir," I said; "but to return to the subject. About three months ago, I was employed by Richard Livingstone, in my capacity of detective officer, to learn certain facts about a child named Salome, and born at Little Falls, New York State, in 1844. While pursuing my search for the facts concerning this child, I discovered, much to my astonishment, that she was the daughter of Richard's father, Anson Livingstone, and, as she was his oldest child, of course was the heir to all his property. When Livingstone discovered that I knew these facts, and had, as he thought, certain proofs in my possession, in order to obtain those proofs, and stop my mouth, he committed a crime that will put his neck within the halter, the very instant I prove that crime against him. So you see, sir, that I have a very strong motive for pulling Richard Livingstone down, and I can pull him down by giving the girl, Salome, her rights."

"I see," said Mr. Watson, who had listened to all I had said with the utmost attention; "by giving the orphan child her rights, you at the same time revenge yourself upon this man, who has wronged you."

"Exactly!" I said.

"Squar'l" said Joe, in an undertone.

By the way, I have neglected to state that Joe, on arriving at Buffalo, had bought himself an entire suit of black, and, as he familiarly termed it, a "plug" hat, and that now, dressed in his new rig, he looked quite "nobby."

"My dear sir," cried the fat grocer, warmly, "I wish you every success in your undertaking, and I must say I feel sure that you will succeed."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir, for your good wishes," I replied.

"Not good wishes alone!" he cried. "I'm not a very rich man, but I'm worth a little something, and if you need any money, sir, I should be pleased to lend you five hundred or a thousand dollars to push on Miss Salome's cause."

"Thank you, sir," I replied, astonished by his kind offer; "but I have money enough to carry out my plans, and I'll spend every dollar that I'm worth, but this girl, Salome, shall have her rights."

"That's so!" cried Joe; "you're a brick, old top, you air; but we've got the rocks, an' we kin put it through, we kin!"

The little fat grocer looked astonished at the queerness of Joe's speech, but I suppose he set it down as a little bit of eccentricity appertaining to the detective force!

We took our leave of the worthy grocer, followed by his best wishes for our success. Then Joe and I returned at once to the hotel. The interview with Mr. Watson had taken up some time, and we found that dinner was ready when we returned.

Dinner over, I gave notice at the office that I expected a visitor, and should be in my room all the afternoon. And in my room all the afternoon I waited. Joe extended himself upon the sofa and read a little while, and then went to sleep, while I, uneasy as a caged tiger, paced up and down the floor. The hours passed slowly by, and yet she did not come. Every time that I heard a footstep near the door, I expected that it was a waiter with a message that a lady wished to see me. But no message, no lady came. What could it mean? I thought this: Nell would probably go to the post-office between eleven and three, she would find my letter there, and then would come instantly to see me. But five o'clock had come, and no Nellie!

Oh, how impatient I grew! At last an idea struck me. I would go to the post-office and inquire if my letter had been called for. The thought was a good one. I woke Joe up at once, and told him if any one called, to tell them I would be back soon, and to detain him or

her until I did come. Then I took my hat and set out for the post-office.

On arriving there, I went to the ladies' window. To the clerk there, I explained my wishes.

The clerk was a gentlemanly young fellow, and appeared desirous to give all the information in his power. I could see from his looks that he thought that there was a love-scrape at the bottom of it; possibly he was in love himself; most young men are. In fact, they take to it as naturally as young ducks to water.

"N. Orange," he said; "let me see. I think I remember some directions left here about forwarding all letters directed to that address; here it is now," and he took down from a nail and handed out to me a small paper, upon which was written:

"Please forward all letters addressed to Miss N. Orange to New York City, and oolige."

It was Nell's small, legible hand. How well I knew it! although I had never received but a single letter from her, but that letter, every syllable of it, was imprinted on my heart.

Nell had gone to New York, tuen. Good! I was obliged to go there also, and now I had nothing to detain me any longer in Buffalo.

I got back the letter that I had written, telling Nell I was in Buffalo, got a sheet of paper and an envelope from the obliging clerk, and wrote another note to her, telling her that I would be in New York on Wednesday, and that I would be at the post-office there every day at precisely twelve o'clock, so that she could meet me. Then I sealed it up and put it in the mail.

I returned to the hotel, told Joe of the movements ahead, settled our bill, and took the 7:40 Express for New York.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MISSING WILL.

JOE and I arrived at the depôt just in time to catch the train. The cars were full of people, and seats were scarce. Joe, however, managed to get one on ahead while I found one at the rear end of the car, beside an old gentleman with iron-gray hair, and a face bronzed almost as dark as an Indian's.

I have neglected to mention that, before leaving the hotel, after supper, I resumed the disguise that I fled from New York in, namely, the yellow, curly wig and mustache, and again trimmed my eyebrows down, for it must not be forgotten that the sentence of five years at Sing Sing, which my friend Richard had been kind enough to procure me, by his false charge of forgery, was still hanging over me; and that I was liable to be arrested and sent to serve my term out. Of course, if this should happen, it would entirely block my game.

True, I had hopes of a pardon, for I had received a letter in Denver City, from Peters, the detective, telling me that, aided by some influential political friends, he had applied for my pardon and hoped to obtain it from the governor. I knew that Peters had a great deal of influence with certain parties who controlled the wires by which certain political puppets danced; and politics have a great deal to do sometimes with the pardon of criminals, in some States of our great and glorious Union. Besides, the crime which I was accused of committing, and for which I had been convicted, was quite a trivial one in the opinion of the world. Picking a pocket or robbing a house, are horrible offenses against the law, but forging a friend's name for a few thousand, or robbing the bank of which you are a trusted servant and supposed guardian, are pleasantly denominated "financial irregularities," and if the skillful "operator" happens to sometimes be unskillful enough to let himself be detected in his little "pleasantries," the world exclaims, "a very weak and foolish young man—to allow himself to be caught."

After the train had been under way a short time, I fell into conversation with the elderly gentleman, with the iron-gray hair and bronzed face, who occupied the seat with me. Of course, as was natural, our first remarks had reference to the weather; from that we glided into politics—the election being near at hand. Soon I found, to my utter astonishment, that the stranger was totally ignorant regarding the present politics of New York State—a fact which he explained by stating that he had been traveling in India for the past five years. I soon gathered from his conversation—for he spoke freely and without reserve—that he was what the French would call a "savant;" in truth, was a very learned man, about certain things. He had traveled in the East a great deal, and, as he informed me, spoke the Hindoo tongue like a native. In order to penetrate to certain places, in India, which he had wished to reach, he had found it necessary to assume the native garb and character of a Hindoo, which his bronzed complexion and perfect knowledge of their language easily enabled him to do.

I was quite interested in his story of his travels for he spoke in an easy, off-hand manner, without any particular desire to make himself the hero of his tale, although he was so, in reality. I soon discovered the charm of his manner; he loved the subject he was speaking of. Although

born in Albany and reared there, remaining in that city, as he told me, until he was twenty-one, nearly all the rest of his life had been spent in the Orient.

"I commenced the study of the Hindoo tongue when I was yet a lad," he said. "I do not know how it was, but the study seemed to possess a peculiar charm for me. When I attained the age of twenty-one my father died and left me quite a fortune; my mother had died when I was an infant. I had no brothers or sisters; my nearest relatives were my cousins, who lived in Buffalo. After my father's death, I stopped with them some little time, when the idea took possession of me to go to India, and in person see the country, and there, from the natives, thoroughly study the tongue. No sooner had I thought of this than I set about it. So, sir, when I was twenty-two years old, I went to India and have remained there most of the time since; that is, when I say that, I except a visit that I made home about five years ago. It's strange, sir, but I have been called home from India twice by death. The first time, one of my cousins died, and, as he had some little property, he chose to make a will and appoint me executor, knowing at the same time that I was in the wilds of Hindostan, and for all he knew I might be making a meal for some hungry tiger in one of its jungles, or strangled by some religious 'Thug' as an offering to the great Brahma."

"The letter, sir, informing me of the death of my cousin, was two years in reaching me, for I was on an expedition up in the 'hill country,' and the letter lay in Calcutta until I returned."

"Well, that was a long time," I said; "I should have thought the heirs here would have become impatient."

"I rather think they did," responded the "savant," with a dry chuckle. "But, here again, the reason for my return now is that one of my early friends has seen fit to intrust his affairs in my hands. Not a relative this time, mind, but only an old friend. He and I were school fellows together, at Albany, and when he was married in Buffalo, I promised to be present, but unfortunately I forgot the direction and missed the minister's house. That was way back in '43. I didn't see him again until about five years ago, when I returned from India, and, passing through New York, en route for Buffalo, I called upon him. He was then one of the leading men of New York. I only made a short visit, don't think I stopped over half an hour, and I remember that he asked particularly what my post-office address was; and, when I spoke about settling up this will business in Buffalo, and what a trouble it was, he laughed, and asked—should I happen to outlive him, would I take charge of his will? Of course, for the joke of the thing, I said I would, that I would be delighted. Now, what do you think, sir?" and the old man laid the fore-finger of one hand impressively on the palm of the other. "That man remembered this conversation of five years ago, and when he got ready to make his will, which was about a year ago, after he had made it, he sent it to my address at Buffalo, with directions to keep it there till I should return home, and, with the will, he sent a letter to be forwarded to me, wherever I might be. The letter was just about a year in reaching me, for it arrived in Calcutta shortly after I had started on an expedition for the headwaters of the Ganges. When I returned about a year afterward, I found it there waiting for me. I read it through, carefully. He didn't give any reason for intrusting the will to my care—only reminded me of my promise, and begged of me by the memory of our old friendship, to keep that promise, and obscurely hinted that, upon my faithfully carrying out his wishes as expressed in the will, depended the righting of a foul wrong. All this, mind you, was quite mysterious; but, of course, there was no need of my returning to the States until the man was dead, which event, he said in his letter, I must not be surprised to hear of at any time, as his health had been failing."

"Well, now, as this letter had been waiting for me nearly a year, and no other had come notifying me of his death—for of course his son would have written in the event of his father's death, knowing that I had the will—I concluded that his health had improved. But, judge of my astonishment, when, a few days after this, I happened to take up an old *New York Herald*, and read there an account of the death of Anson Livingstone."

"Livingstone!" I cried, with a start of surprise. Luckily the "savant" happened to look out of the window just then, and did not notice my astonishment.

"Yes," he replied, "you have probably heard of him; he was an old New Yorker. I've got his will now, here in my breast-pocket."

Fortune had again favored me! Here was the man with the missing will!

"Ah, indeed!" I said, more for the sake of saying something, than anything else.

"Yes, sir; it's rather a strange story, for the moment I saw the notice of the death of my friend, I started for home instantly. On arriving in New York, I wrote to Mr. Richard Livingstone, the son of my old friend—told him I had his father's will—that I would proceed to

Buffalo, get it and return to the city and see him on the subject. Then I pushed on instantly for Buffalo. I had a little business there to arrange, for one of my cousins, which I saw would detain me a week, so I wrote to Mr. Livingstone and told him I would be in New York on Wednesday next—that's to-morrow—and that I should like to meet him at the dépôt. Well, I received an answer at once. I gathered from his letter that he knew that his father had left a will, and what the contents of the will were, but that he had been in the dark as to who had it. Now, that seemed very strange to me, for I should have certainly thought that the father would have told the son all about it."

Fortune was putting Livingstone's game right into my hands. I thought I could guess what the plan was, but I determined to learn all I could in regard to it.

"Perhaps the reason that the old man did not confide the secret of the will to his son, was that he did not leave all his property to him, but bestowed the greater part of his wealth elsewhere," I said, throwing this out as a sort of afeeler.

"No, no!" responded the "savant," "Richard says expressly, in his letter, that the disposition of his father's property is perfectly satisfactory, both to himself and his sister, Olive."

"Ah! you wrote him, then, in regard to the division made by the will," I said, feeling my way cautiously.

"No, of course not!" he exclaimed; "how could I? The will is securely sealed up, and is not to be opened except in the presence of certain parties, whom he names in connection with myself. I wrote as much to Richard."

I saw Livingstone's "little game" now. He had determined to get this will into his possession; to do that he must use foul means.

Little did the gray-haired "savant" dream that he had journeyed through the wilds of India, and escaped the jaws of the wild beasts, the silken noose and knife of the "Thug" assassin, to encounter here, in his own native land, the most terrible danger that he had ever met.

"Will the gentleman you speak of meet you at the dépôt?" I asked.

"So he said in his letter," he replied. "I sent him a description of my personal appearance; he will not be likely to mistake me," he added, with a laugh.

The past was all clear to me now; when Richard Livingstone showed me the draft of his father's will, he did not believe the will itself was in existence, and no wonder, for his father had been dead a year, and no one had come forward with the will. All this time it lay in Buffalo, while the letter apprising the "savant" of the fact was waiting in Calcutta for him to return from his expedition. Strange are the ways of fate, and I surely must be a favored son of fortune. Here had I accidentally fallen in with the very man whom, to serve Livingstone's purpose, fate should have kept out of my way. Yet here we were, riding side by side, and he had told me the very thing I ought to know.

Fortune, too, had favored the old "savant," for he was going to meet a terrible danger—one all the more terrible because it was not looked for, and came at the hands of a supposed friend; but he had Joe and I to watch over him; for I had resolved not to lose sight of him, if I could help it. In thinking the matter over I came to the conclusion that Livingstone would not take him to his own house, for it was his policy not to excite the old man's suspicions, but to appear anxious to have the will produced. If the "savant" was robbed of the will in the house of Richard, why, the old fellow would naturally think that there was something wrong, but if he lost the will before reaching the house, he could not implicate Richard in the transaction. Livingstone's game, then, was to send him to a hotel, and then have some shrewd fellow "go through him."

I would have liked to have given the "savant" a slight warning, but I could not easily do it without exposing my hand in the "little game" too much; and that, I was afraid, would spoil all.

I thought the situation all over, and I rather congratulated myself upon the favorable look that things wore. In the first place, I had the "sinews of war"—plenty of money; then I had the proofs of the marriage of the mother, and the birth of the child. Then I had the heir herself, in New York, just where I could put my hand upon her; and now, the crowning triumph! I had discovered the man who had the will! Then a sudden thought struck me—was I particularly anxious to have this will produced? Yes; for if the will was destroyed, Salome could only claim one-third of the estate, while Richard and Olive would take the other two-thirds. No! what the deuce was I thinking off? Richard and Olive were both illegitimate children. Their mother's marriage was not legal, for Anson Livingstone's first wife was then living. Therefore they could claim nothing if the will was destroyed, and Salome could take all. Clearly, then, it was for my interest that the will should be destroyed, for that would make Richard Livingstone a beggar.

On we went, in the darkness of the night. After a little more conversation, none of which

had any bearing on my story, the gray-haired "savant" went to sleep. I endeavored to follow his example, but for a long time was unsuccessful. A certain face, fringed with hair of tawny beauty, and lit by steel blue orbs, was ever and anon dancing before my eyes. Strange how the two passions, love and hate, were ruling my nature. If I did not think of poor Pat's death, and vengeance upon the assassin, Livingstone, then I thought of Nell, the Orange Girl, and love. Is there nothing in this life but love? Is this the beginning and the end of all? Yes, it is; life is love, and love is life!

Finally, my eyes closed in sleep, but, even in my dreams, the fair round face, with its pure, innocent smile, was always present.

We reached Albany about six in the morning. During the stop there, I had a few minutes' conversation with Joe, and told him all I had discovered. For the better carrying out of my plans, I suggested that, in the dépôt in New York, we should appear as strangers to each other, but for him to keep a narrow watch upon my movements, and when the time for other action came, I would advise him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOUBLE-BANKING OPERATION.

THE train on the Hudson River Railroad bearing the "savant," William Vanderwilt—so he was called—Joe Sparks and myself, arrived in New York City a few minutes before one o'clock. It was a pleasant day, the sun beaming down warmly, although the air was rather chilly. Mr. Vanderwilt and myself, after the train had stopped in the dépôt, left the car. Hardly had we stepped upon the platform, before a young, stoutly-built fellow, dressed in a plain suit of black, came up to Mr. Vanderwilt, and, speaking quite politely, said:

"Isn't this Mr. Vanderwilt, of Buffalo?"

"Yes, sir," said the "savant," in reply.

"Ah, I thought I could not be mistaken, by the description," said the stranger. "Allow me to introduce myself; my name is Everett Clark. I have the honor to be Mr. Livingstone's secretary. Mr. Livingstone has been called out of town suddenly, on important business, and requested me to meet you at the dépôt."

I "tumbled" to this "little game" at once, as a detective might say. This was Livingstone's first move. He did not intend to see Vanderwilt until the said Vanderwilt had been relieved of the important document, the will of his father, Anson, which the gray-haired guest carried in his breast-pocket. I guessed the movement that this "secretary," Mr. Everett Clark, was to carry out. His business was to relieve Mr. Vanderwilt of the precious will, without exciting his suspicions. This Mr. Clark was probably some shrewd "confidence operator," one of those gentlemen who have a "check to cash," but the bank has just been closed; "would Mr. Greenhorn, who has just arrived from the country, lend him a hundred, or two or three hundred, according to the amount of money said Greenhorn happens to have about him, and take the check for security?" In nine cases out of ten, Mr. Greenhorn is only too happy to oblige such a perfect gentleman as Mr. Oily Gammon, Esq., the gentleman with the check. Mr. Greenhorn lends his city friend all the loose cash he has about him, takes the check, and then Mr. Oily Gammon suddenly remembers that he has an appointment with Peter Cooper, Herace Greeley, Mayor Hall, or some other noted individual, and hurries away, promising, however, to return in an hour or so, and redeem the check. Mr. Greenhorn waits patiently; the time expires; the gentleman from the rural "destricks" begins to feel anxious at the non-appearance of his agreeable friend; a peculiar sensation creeps over him; a slight suspicion that perhaps all is not right; but, then, he looks at the bank-check in his hand: "Pay to bearer \$500 00," drawn on the First National Bank. That makes him safe anyway, but, as a matter of precaution, he will go to the bank and inquire. He does so, and is somewhat astonished on receiving information that the valuable check is worth simply what it will fetch as waste paper. Mr. Greenhorn departs for the rural "destricks," by the first conveyance, a sadder, but a wiser man; or, perhaps he is of a combative nature, and rushes at once to the nearest police-station to have the infernal scoundrel arrested; the polite clerk in attendance at the station listens to his woeful story, and takes a description of the rogue, which is always particularly indefinite. Mr. Greenhorn now feels satisfied; justice is on the track; he will sit down and wait until the blue-coated Metropolis bring in the rascal. The gentlemen from the rural districts always have an immense idea of the power of the city police; but the obliging clerk informs him that the police stations are not hotels, and that not only hours but days may elapse before the rogue is caught, and he will take Mr. Greenhorn's address and notify him when his presence is desired to make his charge. Mr. Greenhorn departs, fully satisfied that at last he will have justice. As he goes through the door, the polite clerk puts his tongue in his cheek in quite a significant manner and exclaims:

"Walker!"

The stout policeman on duty returns the peculiar smile and says, briefly:

"Not much!"

All of which are supposed to refer to the improbability of Mr. Confidence Operator ever being caught. This is no fancy case that I have been stating, but one that occurs in all our great cities nearly every day. Once in a while it gets into the police column of the newspaper; but, nearly always, the sufferer, conscious of his own stupidity in being swindled in such an easy manner, holds his tongue and says nothing about it.

This Mr. Clark, from the peculiar, restless look of his light-blue eyes, and the extreme soberness of his "get-up"—that is, his dress and general appearance—I set down at once as belonging to that class of people who are said to get their living by their wits—or, in other words, those who prey upon the weakness of their fellow-beings by cunning, not by force.

I knew very well that, two months ago, Livingstone had no secretary, and, as he had no particular business cares to attend to, it was not likely that he had one now. As the police would say, it was a "plant"; so I looked around carefully for Mr. Clark's confederates. I was not long in discovering them. Three men stood in a little group on the platform—three fine specimens of that peculiar class that flourish only in cities, and are known by the general term of "rough"—individuals generally very well known to the police. They were stoutly-built fellows, with hair cut short to what my friend Joe would call a "fighting-crop"; black, bristling mustaches, red faces, and small, evil-looking eyes. These fellows were standing near the doorway, watching Mr. Everett Clark and my friend, the savant, very intently. I had an idea, now, what their "little game" was. As Vanderwilt passed through the door they would probably block up the entrance, and, in the little confusion thus occasioned, would pick his pockets; but I had little fear of their getting the will, because he had told me that it was in the breast-pocket of his body-coat, and he had his overcoat tightly buttoned up. Besides, Joe and I would be near at hand, and I didn't intend to let them proceed in their operations uninterrupted. But I thought to myself: I must warn Joe, somehow, and put him on his guard, because I had a fancy that Joe's powerful arm—the terrible "left duke" of the pugilistic "Spider"—would soon be brought into service. Joe, for a little man, was the most terrible left-handed hitter that I had ever seen.

Of course all these thoughts passed through my mind in a very few minutes. Minutes? Seconds I should say, for they occurred while Mr. Vanderwilt replied to the secretary's speech.

"When does Mr. Livingstone return?"

"To-morrow, sir, I expect him back. It was quite urgent business that took him away, and he desired me to say to you that he was extremely sorry that he could not meet you as agreed upon."

"Oh, business is business, sir, of course. I know that, although I'm not a business man," replied the savant.

"Well, I suppose we might as well go at once to a hotel. I am obliged to take you to a hotel, Mr. Vanderwilt, because at present there are repairs being put upon Mr. Livingstone's house, and all the family are out of town."

The "secretary" delivered this in such a nice, easy manner that I was quite charmed with his power of conversation and the easy facility with which he lied. It was truly a capital excuse to prevent Vanderwilt from going to Richard's house. At a hotel, he would be completely at the mercy of the "secretary."

"Ah! I am sorry for that, for I should have liked to have seen Miss Olive," said Vanderwilt.

"Oh, she will return, sir, before you go away. I heard her speak of that particularly. The repairs in fact are all done, and they will have the house in order in a day or two; so that you will only have to stop at the hotel a very short time. By the way, is there any particular hotel that you prefer going to?"

My admiration for Mr. Everett was increased considerably by this adroitly-put speech. I knew very well that "Mr. Secretary" had already arranged in his own mind as to what hotel my friend, the savant, should go, and had even probably picked out the room for his victim—the one most convenient for his purpose.

"No," said Vanderwilt; "I have no particular preference; one is as good as another for me."

"Well, I had an idea that perhaps you hadn't any decided liking, and so I spoke about a room for you at my place, the Metropolitan Hotel. They had a very nice one right next to mine, so I engaged it, as Mr. Livingstone left particular orders that nothing should be left undone to make you comfortable."

The smooth manners of the tricky agent of Livingstone I saw had made quite a favorable impression upon Vanderwilt; in fact, I must own that the fellow was smart, and if I hadn't been on my guard, he possibly would have deceived me; but I had looked behind the curtain

of deceit, and knew something of the wires that made the puppets dance.

"I am really much obliged to Mr. Livingstone," replied Vanderwilt; "I am much obliged to him for his kindness."

"Oh, don't mention it, sir," cried Mr. Everett, quickly. "As a friend of his father, of course, sir, he must feel a high degree of respect for you."

It was evident that the "agent" was well posted in the premises, as a lawyer would say. Richard had chosen his man carefully. The Metropolitan Hotel, too—one of the leading hotels of New York City; nothing in that to excite the suspicions of the stranger. And in one of the large New York hotels, what splendid chances to play their "little game" and rob Vanderwilt of the precious will, provided they could not pick his pocket and relieve him of it beforehand! Decidedly, the whole scheme was worthy the clear head of Richard. He was a man of genius, beyond all question, although his genius took the road that leads to the State Prison.

"Have you any baggage, sir?" asked the "secretary."

"Yes, a carpet-bag, only; here is the check."

"If you will permit, I'll get it for you, and we can take an omnibus right down-town; I detect these close carriages," said Everett.

"Certainly; I shall be much obliged," replied the savant; and away went the secretary with the check.

Here was another chance for them; if they couldn't pick his pocket in the depot, why, they might in the omnibus. I could not but admire the carefully arranged details of the plan, particularly as Joe and I could upset it all; but I saw I must find a chance to speak to Joe, and warn him.

"Quite an agreeable fellow, this Mr. Clark, don't you think so?" said Vanderwilt.

"Yes, quite so."

Then a thought occurred to me, and I turned round and pretended to see Joe for the first time; he was standing on the platform a short distance from us.

"Why, Mr. Sparks!" I cried, "how are you?" and rushed over to him and took him by the hand warmly.

"How do you do?" exclaimed Joe, understanding the little movement at once, and taking me by the hand as though I was an old friend that he hadn't seen for years.

"Joe," said I, sinking my voice down low, "have you noticed these three fellows standing over there together and watching Vanderwilt?"

"What—those three 'roughs'?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I have. What of 'em?"

"They'll probably try the jam game as we go through the doorway, and pick Vanderwilt's pocket. Now, I'll take you over and introduce you to Vanderwilt, and just as we get to the door you slip ahead of him and go through first, and if there's any difficulty, why, hit out strong!"

"You bet!" was Joe's emphatic response. "If they give me any of their slack, I'll climb on their eyebrows lively."

"All right; keep your eyes open," I replied; then I took him over to Vanderwilt and introduced him to the savant as Mr. Sparks from Nebraska.

Just then the secretary, Mr. Clark, returned with the savant's carpet-bag.

"I've got it, sir," said he. "I suppose we might as well go now," and then he glanced suspiciously at Joe and myself.

Before I had stood behind Vanderwilt, and he hadn't noticed me.

"By the way, Mr. James," said Vanderwilt, turning to me, "are you going to any hotel? If you are, why not come to the Metropolitan with me?"

Now, this was exactly what I wanted; in fact, I was just trying to think of some excuse to "wring in" on the party, and now here was the opportunity offered! Of course I jumped at the chance.

"I guess I will go to the Metropolitan," I said.

Mr. Everett looked disgusted; this was an addition to his party that he had not counted upon.

"Mr. James Mr. Clark," said Vanderwilt, introducing.

I, of course, immediately expressed my pleasure, which I could plainly see was not reciprocated on Mr. Clark's part. Then I introduced Joe. It was hard work for Mr. Everett Clark to look pleased. In his heart, I've no doubt, he wished us all in Topbet. But there was no help for him. Here we were all together, and to separate us would be difficult. I saw that he was thinking over his plan of action. I had an idea that he was not going to try the pickpocket business, as I noticed that his eyes wandered irresolutely over to where his confederates stood. They were doubtless waiting for some signal from him. Suddenly he seemed to have decided, for he raised his left hand and stroked his chin carelessly. This was evidently the signal they had been expecting, for they walked quickly over to the doorway nearest to us. They did

not pass through the doorway, however, but stood on the inside. I saw that the movement was to be attempted, so I winked a warning at Joe, but his quick eye had also seen the movement of the "roughs," and I noticed that he quietly closed his left hand in readiness for the attack.

"I suppose we may as well go," repeated Mr. Everett.

"Certainly," said Vanderwilt; and we started in the following order: first came the "secretary," carrying the carpet bag; then Mr. Vanderwilt; then Joe, and then myself.

Just as we got to the doorway, Clark quickened his pace and passed through, leaving a space between him and Vanderwilt that "rough No. 1" instantly stepped forward and occupied. The other two roughs attempted to push in between Vanderwilt and Joe, but were roughly shoved back by Joe, who, in the little confusion that this occasioned, changed positions and took Vanderwilt's place, so that when "rough No. 1" in the doorway turned round suddenly and stopped, expecting by this movement to jam Vanderwilt up against the other two roughs in the rear, so that in the confusion they could "go through" his pockets, he encountered Joe, who carried his arms well up, ready for a blow.

"Who're you pushin'?" sung out Joe, to "rough No. 1," giving him a shove in the breast that forced him half-way through the door space—I, at the same time, being between Vanderwilt and the two roughs in the rear, thus preventing them from operating upon his pockets.

"What did yer do that fur?" demanded "rough No. 1," turning upon Joe with an oath.

"Fun, fun!" responded Joe, coolly, still keeping hands up ready for a guard.

"Fun!—you!" cried the rough, making a sudden pass at Joe's head, which would probably have seriously damaged my friend's nose, but for his quick right arm, that threw the blow off to one side; then, with a suddenness that can only be compared to the jump of a cat, he drew back his terrible left arm, and, with the whole weight of his muscular body, delivered a terrible blow that took the rough square on the chin, lifted him off his feet, and knocked him clean through the doorway down the steps onto the hard sidewalk.

Joe followed his fallen foe, and we all passed through the doorway.

"Double-bank him, blast him!" cried "rough No. 2," making a dash at Joe.

"Double-bank," in sporting parlance, is to take an unfair advantage, two or more on one. But Joe was not easily double-banked, especially when I took a hand in, as I speedily did, knocking one of the ruffians into the gutter with a swinging bit under the ear. A crowd assembled speedily; the cry "police!" was raised. The two roughs that were able took to their heels; the first, who was still insensible, was captured by the Metropolitans, while Joe, the savant and myself got off unnoticed in the crowd. I never saw a man look so thoroughly disgusted as Clark did at the failure of plan No. 1.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MASQUERADE BALL AT THE ACADEMY.

"You settled that fellow speedily," said Vanderwilt, in admiration of the scientific manner in which my friend, Joe the Spider, had disposed of the rough.

"You bet!" said Joe, emphatically; "we handle some very rough customers out in the mines, sometimes, and a man's got to know how to hit out, to travel fur in the diggin's."

Clark, the "secretary," the wily agent of Livingstone, looked crestfallen at the failure of the first attack, and uttered never a word as we made our way to the omnibus.

As we rode down town, I could see that Clark was busy thinking—probably revolving over in his mind what scheme to try next to gain possession of the precious will that the savant, Vanderwilt carried on his person. I watched him closely, and soon I saw that his brow, clouded over with the shades of depression, black as night, began to grow lighter; then a faint smile appeared around the corners of his thin, treacherous-looking lips. He had conceived a scheme to suit him. I must be on my guard, then, to defeat him. I had until twelve o'clock of the next day to myself, for at twelve on the morrow I was to be at the post-office to meet Nell, the girl of my heart. I had but little doubt that she would get the letter I had written to her from Buffalo, and keep the appointment I had made.

Now, my object was to keep close to Vanderwilt, and thus prevent this "Mr. Clark" or his confederates from robbing him.

Of course Clark had no suspicion that either Joe or myself knew his "little game"—how should he! Both Joe and I were strangers to him; he could not possibly guess, for a single moment, that we knew the mission on which he had been dispatched by Richard Livingstone, or that we were determined to prevent him from accomplishing that mission. In this I had the advantage. He thought his object was unknown, whereas I knew it as well as he did. The row in

the dépôt, in which Joe polished off his confederates so handsomely, looked only as the result of accident. He, of course, could not think that it was a well-laid plan on the part of Joe and myself to prevent his associates from robbing the savant. But now the question was, what little dodge would he try next, since his first scheme had failed?

We reached the hotel, registered our names, and then went in to dinner.

Dinner over, our rooms were allotted to us. Clark, of course, had his already, and one picked out and saved for Vanderwilt; then we ascended in the "elevator"—the convenient machine that saves going up-stairs to the third story. Luckily for my plans, we were all located on the same story. As I had suspected, Clark had picked out the room next to his own for Vanderwilt, and a door led from one into the other—a nice little arrangement for Mr. "Secretary," truly.

After we had examined our rooms, Clark sent for a bottle of champagne, and extended a cordial invitation for us to join him in a social glass in his room. Of course we accepted.

The wine brought, we fell to discussing that and the current topics of the day.

"By the way," said the savant, "what do these flaming hand-bills of the 'Wickedest Man in New York' mean, that I see about the streets?"

"They have reference to John Allen, who keeps a sailor's dance-house, in Water street," replied Clark.

"Well, is the man really so bad?"

"No," responded Clark; "there are twenty others just as bad as he. It's all a money-making scheme. A monthly magazine wants to get up a sensation—something to make it sell. To this end it is necessary to get everybody to talk about it. Some publishers achieve that by large and persistent advertising, but that costs a great deal of money. The great study of all good business men in this world is to have their business advertised without costing them anything. That was the idea of the publisher I speak of. He employed an able writer—one of that class of writers called sensational—to write up some subject which would instantly attract the public's attention, and also be mentioned gratuitously by every journal in the country. Who selected the subject, this John Allen—whether it was publisher or author—I, of course, don't know; but the article, headed the 'Wickedest Man,' was a decided success. Nearly every daily paper in the country copied portions of the article. The result was that it rushed the sale of the magazine up enormously; to use the popular expression, it went like 'hot cakes,' and John Allen, the keeper of a common sailors' dance-house in Water street—a place neither better nor worse than a dozen others of the same class—became notorious. Everybody was talking about the 'Wickedest Man in New York'; hundreds rushed down to see the dance-house and the 'soiled doves,' its inmates, who decoyed and fleeced poor 'Jack.' Of course Allen, the keeper, liked it at first, because it brought custom to his den; for it is a den, though, from the illustrations and descriptions in some of the weekly papers, one would be apt to imagine it a palace. Then this man pretexts a sort of half-piety, as though a man could serve Heaven and the devil at the same time, and thus the case stands. His place was filled to overflowing every night, and quite a number used to go there in the daytime, but Allen, just now, is beginning to grumble because, he says, the prayer-meetings don't pay; so he has put back the girls and the liquor, and entices poor sailors, just the same as before. By the way, we'll go down there some night, if you like, and you can see for yourself."

"I should be pleased to go," replied Vanderwilt.

This little description, by Mr. Clark, of the Water street den, rather increased my opinion of his cleverness. He was a man of brain, though working for evil, not for good. I felt that I needed all my shrewdness, or he would beat me in the game we were playing.

"By-the-by, Mr. Vanderwilt," said Clark, "did you ever go to a masquerade ball?"

"No," replied the savant; "I have never attended one."

"The Arion Society give a grand masquerade to-night at the Academy of Music. We have nothing else to do; suppose we go?" said Clark.

"I think it's a good idea. What do you say, gentlemen?" said Vanderwilt.

Both Joe and I signified an assent to the proposition.

"I had better go, then, and make arrangements for costumes," said Clark. "What dress would you like, Mr. Vanderwilt?"

"Well, I haven't the slightest idea. What do you think, Mr. James?" asked the savant.

"I think a monk's dress—a plain domino, because it's no trouble, and you can put it on over your own citizen's dress and save changing," I said.

"That's a capital idea!" said Vanderwilt.

"Shall I get your dominos for you, gentlemen? I can as well as not!" added Clark.

I thanked him kindly for the offer, but declined. I knew at once that this visit to the masquerade concealed some trap, and I did not choose that he should select two conspicuous

dominos for Joe and myself, as I knew he would, thus to be able to mark us for his confederates. I had resolved to wear plain black. I felt sure that twenty others would be dressed the same, and in the crowd it would be hard work to tell one black domino from another.

After a little more conversation, Clark and I started to walk down the street to get our tickets and dresses. I left Joe with Vanderwilt, with strict instructions to keep his eyes open during my absence. I did not fear, however, that Clark and his confederates would attempt anything before night. I felt assured the next plan would be developed at the masquerade; what it would be, however, I could not guess as yet, but I felt I must trust to my wits to defeat it when they began to put it in operation.

Clark and I walked down Broadway as far as the corner of Broome street. There we parted; he went up Broome street, to visit a costumer, and I remained on the corner a few minutes to make sure that he would not return to spy upon my footsteps. Then I crossed over to the other side of the street, went up-stairs, and knocked at the door of the office of my friend, John Peters, the detective. Peters opened the door in person. He knew me in an instant.

"You're just the man I wanted to see!" he cried, as he grasped me warmly by the hand and drew me inside the door.

"Well, I'm glad of that," I answered.

"I couldn't very well write to you, because you told me in your letter, from Denver City, that you were going up the mountains, so I was waiting to hear from you again."

"What is it—any good news?" I asked.

"Oh! not much; only this." He went to the little desk in the office, and from one of the pigeon-holes took out a large yellow envelope. From this envelope he took a folded paper, opened it, and at the bottom of the paper showed me the seal of the State of New York, and the clerical signature of the governor. It was my pardon!

I tell you, my heart gave a great leap when my eyes took in the contents of that little sheet of paper. It was life and liberty to me. Now, once again, I could walk the streets of my native city, without having the dismal fear that a blue-coated Metropolitan, or a bird of prey in the shape of a private detective, would be tapping me on the shoulder with the polite but significant intimation—"I want you!"

Warmly I wrung Peters's hand in my joy.

"Thank you, John," I cried. "I can never repay this service."

"Yes, you can; if not to me, to some one else," he replied. "It may be in your power one of these days to help a fellow-creature; by helping him you repay the service I have done you; that's the way I look at it. We were all put in this world to aid one another; that's my doctrine."

"And a good, sound one it is, too; but, tell me, how did you contrive to procure this pardon?"

"Oh! it was simple enough. I am very well acquainted with a prominent politician who yields great influence in the politics of the State, and through him the work was done."

Again I thanked him, and then I proceeded to tell him what had occurred during my absence.

Peters listened to my story with attention. He was particularly pleased when I told him how I became heir to the gold left by "English Bob," and of my discovery of all the proofs needed to give Salome Livingstone the fortune now held and enjoyed by the half-brother, Richard. I also told him of the "secretary," Mr. Clark, who had met Vanderwilt and myself at the dépôt; of my conviction that he intended to rob Vanderwilt of the precious will at the masquerade ball at the Academy of Music that was to take place that evening.

Peters thought for a moment.

"I tell you what it is," he said; "I haven't any thing particular to do just now. Suppose I take a hand in this 'little game'."

"The very favor I would have asked!" I cried.

"All right; I'm your man! Hank and I—Hank Henry, my partner, you know—will be on hand at this masquerade ball to-night. I don't agree with you in one thing, though; I don't think they'll try the dodge there, because, if he carries this will in a breast-pocket, it will be difficult for them to get at it. Their plan will probably be to get him away somewhere to take some supper, or something of that sort, and then 'fix' him. You see, the reason for going to the masquerade is, that in the crowd they can easily separate him from you and your friend."

I could not help saying that this appeared to me to be reasonable.

"I think so," he replied. "Now, Hank and I will watch outside, so that, if they do separate him from you, and try to run him off to some other place, why we'll be down on them, sharp as needles. What do you think of my plan?"

"It is excellent," I replied.

"I think it will hold water, as the English say," he said, quietly.

"And the moment we settle this will business, I shall bring suit against Livingstone to force him to vacate the property."

"That's your game!" cried Peters, emphatic-

ally. "I think you stand chance to win, now."

"I hope so," I replied.

"You'll start for the Academy about nine o'clock, won't you?" he said.

"Yes."

"Very well; Hank and I will be on guard there at nine precisely."

So, with a parting grasp of the hand, I left Peters's office. I went instantly to a costumer's on Broome street, and got a couple of black dominos for Joe and myself, then bought a couple of tickets for the masquerade.

So far, all had gone well. Could I but foil Richard's plans to gain possession of the will, and manage to have it destroyed, I would ask for nothing better. To-morrow, too, I should meet Nell, the blue-eyed witch, whose sweet face haunted my slumbers—Nell, who was to be the angel of my life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. CLARK'S "LITTLE GAME."

I RETURNED at once to the hotel. I found that Clark had already got back, and was seated in the office talking with Vanderwilt and Joe.

"Did you get your dominos, Mr. James?" he asked.

"Yes, I have them."

"Did you think to get any masks?"

"No, I didn't."

"Oh! we must have some masks by all means," cried Vanderwilt; "we must be disguised for a masquerade, or else there wouldn't be any fun."

"That's so," chimed in Joe.

"Suppose, Mr. James," said Clark, "that we take a walk up Broadway and get some masks. We have plenty of time before supper."

"Certainly," I replied; "I'm agreeable; let's be off at once."

So, up Broadway Mr. Clark and I started. I noticed that, as we walked up the street, Clark kept his eyes on ahead; as though he was looking for some one. I kept close watch upon him. I was playing a difficult game, and it was necessary that I should see all the moves appertaining to it.

Just as we crossed over Bleeker street, I noticed that his eyes brightened. He had evidently seen what he had been looking for. Of course I was careful not to let him see that I was noticing him. I looked on ahead at the throng coming down the street, to see who it was that Clark had been expecting to meet, for I felt sure, from his movement, that he had been expecting to meet some one. I soon saw who it was. It was a woman—a woman dressed in the height of fashion; a short dress, little hat, dainty boots, pale-green kid gloves, matching the underskirt of silk, peculiarly-arranged head-dress, with the long, loose tress of perfumed hair floating down over the shoulder. All was charming. She was pretty, too. A little below the medium height, with a well-proportioned form—that is, to the eye well-proportioned; I believe our fashionable ladies sometimes owe something of their exquisite figures to the skill of their dressmakers and to a certain Southern plant the product of which, before the war, was dignified by the title of "King." Be that as it may, I will not attempt to discover or reveal the secrets of the feminine toilet, content to take them as they are, angels—when they are not—the opposite. The woman advancing—I use the good, old term, woman, as being preferable to the modern, shabby-genteel appellation, lady—was fair to look upon. Her face was oval; the features regular; the eyes and hair dark-brown, and but for certain indescribable lines about the eyes and mouth, she could have been called beautiful. But, those lines told of evil passions, swaying the inner nature—passions not controlled, but allowed to have their free sway; of nights spent in dissipation; of deep draughts of the liquid fire that steals the brains away.

On she came, with her dainty tread, exciting general notice. As she passed, men turned round to look after her. I saw that, at quite a distance, she had noticed Clark, although as yet she had not manifested any sign of recognition, but, just as she passed, she appeared to see him for the first time, and bowed. Clark instantly returned the salutation.

"Excuse me for a minute," he said, hastily, "while I speak to that lady."

"Certainly," I answered.

Clark halted, turned round and hastened after the feminine. In a few steps he caught up with her, for she had slackened her pace after passing us. Then they both stopped and held apparently quite an interesting conversation. I noticed that the woman, ever and anon, turned her face my way and indulged herself with a good, long glance at me. Had I been a vain man, I might have thought that the "fair lady" had taken quite a fancy to your "humble servant;" but, not being a vain man, I merely asked myself what "little game" they were going to try now, for, in my own mind, I felt sure that this superciliously-dressed feminine was only another one of Clark's confederates. He had tried force and failed; now he was probably going to try what cunning would do; in fact, put in force the shrewd maxim of the crafty Greek, "when the lion's skin falls short, eke it out with the fox's."

But, in this case, forewarned was to be forearmed, and I had little fear but that I could check all Mr. Clark's moves.

Clark talked with the fair stranger, perhaps ten minutes, and then, with a polite bow, he left her and joined me. As he came up, I happened to glance across the street, and there, on the opposite curb-stone, sucking a quill tooth-pick, and swinging a light cane, in a particularly careless manner, stood my friend, John Peters, the detective. He evidently had been a witness to the interview between Clark and the unknown female. I fancied just then that if Clark knew the parties he had to contend with, he would have given up his "little game" in sheer disgust.

But, we little know in this world what is in store for us. We walk blindly on in our life-path, perhaps happily, ignorant of the future.

"Did you notice the lady?" asked Clark, after he had joined me, and we had again resumed our walk.

"Yes," I answered.

"Pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes, quite pretty."

"She's the daughter of one of the richest merchants in New York; one of the old families, too—none of your modern codfish or coal-oil stock."

"Ah, indeed!" I remarked. I knew well enough that he lied, but I was curious to know what he was after.

"Yes, she's a nice girl, too, not a bit stuck up. She's got plenty of money and she knows how to use it. She drives as handsome a pair of horses as ever trotted through Central Park. I tell you she cuts an awful 'swath,' as they say, on Saturday afternoon at the Park. I have known her ever since we were children and went to school together."

"Ah, indeed!" I knew he was lying again, but I waited patiently for him to unmask the battery, which I felt certain he was bringing to bear on me.

"Yes, we're old acquaintances, you see, though I'm poor and she's rich; but, as I said before, there's no pride about her. She moves in the best society in New York, but she's just as friendly with me as though I was worth a million. In fact, she's a devilish nice girl, as good-natured as she's pretty. By the way, I'd almost forgotten to mention it; she's going to the masquerade to-night."

"What, to the Academy!"

"Yes, just where we are going," he answered. The murder was out now. I knew what the next move was going to be.

"And, speaking of that," he continued; "do you know that you made quite an impression upon her?"

"Did I?" It was the old game over again, but my friend Clark had missed his mark. I was not a "flat" or a "greenhorn" to be twisted round the finger of even a pretty woman.

"Yes, you did, upon my honor," he replied. "She wanted to know particularly who my friend was. I, of course, put in a good word for you, and she looked quite pleased when she learned from me that you were going to the masquerade to-night, and she made me promise to introduce you to her."

"Did she?" cried I, with an innocent smile of delight.

"Oh, yes! she did!" exclaimed Clark, swallowing the bait I had offered him, and I suppose laughing in his sleeve at the easy manner in which he was going to humbug me. "I tell you, you're a lucky fellow, the very first day in New York, to make a conquest of about the prettiest girl in the city! Why, I envy you."

"Do you?" I said this in such a simple, innocent way, how could the wily "secretary"—the shrewd, artful Mr. Clark—the gentleman up to all the dodges of the metropolitan rogues, be else but deceived? It is astonishing how blind these cunning men are sometimes.

"I'll introduce you to-night. She told me what she's going to wear. Her dress is a scarlet domino, trimmed with white. She said she would be there about nine. Now, just you take my advice and follow this thing up. Go in and win."

Oh! how well this man knew the weakness of his fellow-men. With his counsel he appealed to the strongest passion that rules the will of man. I saw his object. His idea was at the masquerade to separate me from Vanderwilt by introducing me to this woman. In all probability he had some similar scheme prepared to entrap Joe. Once we were away from the savant, and lost in the crowd, why he was in their power. I saw the wisdom of Peters's thoughts; he was right—they would not attempt to rob Vanderwilt of the will at the Academy, but would decoy him away elsewhere. The plan was excellent, but it could not succeed. Joe, Peters and myself were too strong for him to cope with.

We stepped into a store devoted to fancy-goods, and bought four half-masks, all of them alike and all black. Then we left the store and strolled down Broadway again toward our hotel.

As we entered the hotel, whom should we meet right on the steps but John Peters. Peters was still sucking his quill toothpick and swinging his

light cane. As we came up the steps, Peters gave Mr. Clark a searching look, but he paid no more attention to me than if I had been an utter stranger. I noticed that Clark became a shade paler as he caught Peters's eyes. It was evident that he knew the detective, but of course he could have no suspicion that Peters was on his track.

After supper we all sat in the office—Vanderwilt, Clark, Joe and myself—and smoked and talked till about nine o'clock; then we took a carriage and were driven to the Academy of Music.

In the carriage we put on our dominos. Clark had procured black dominos for Vanderwilt and himself, so all four were dressed alike.

On arriving at the Academy, we left the carriage and entered the building. There was quite a lot of people going in just then, and they formed a small crowd at the door. I had not yet put on my mask, but held it in my hand, half-concealing my face with it. I was the last of our party; before me was Vanderwilt; before him Joe; and, first of all, Clark. While waiting, some one gave a gentle tug at my domino. I turned my head and found Peters behind me, clad also in a black domino and mask.

"Which is Clark?" he said, in a whisper.

"The one in black ahead; third from me."

"And Vanderwilt?"

"The one just ahead of me in black."

"All right," he answered. "Hank's at the door. I must mark these fellows, so that he and I will know them; there's thirty black dominos here already."

"How mark?" I asked.

"Look over your right shoulder, at the back of your right sleeve."

I did so, and found that where he had placed his hand, he had left a small daub of white paint. With a smile, he showed me a little tin tube of white paint, such as artists use for oil-painting.

"Let me go by you so as to mark the others. Clark and Vanderwilt I will mark on the back; your friend, on the arm like yourself."

Quietly, and without exciting any one's attention, he marked each of the three before him with white paint.

The crowd before us gave way, and we passed into the Academy of Music, the parquet of which had been planked over even with the stage, thus forming a splendid dancing-floor.

The interior was brilliant with lights. All costumes of the world and of all periods floated about the waxed floor in the giddy movement of the dance. All was mirth and fun.

We four stood by the doorway and gazed upon the giddy and sense-entrancing scene. We had been standing there perhaps ten minutes, when a female form, clad in a scarlet domino, trimmed with white, and leaning on the arm of a large gentleman disguised as a red devil, came past. The lady bowed to Clark, who had not covered his face with his mask.

"That is Miss Preston," said Clark to me, grasping my arm and pointing to the figure in scarlet; "come with me and I'll introduce you."

"Is that the one who passed us on Broadway to-day?" I asked.

"Yes; but, confound it, I've lost sight of her now in the crowd. Never mind; she'll be around again presently." Then Clark turned his attention to Vanderwilt, and commenced explaining to him the different costumes.

"Alex," said Peters, who had quietly kept out of sight and followed close behind me, "what did he say about that woman in scarlet?"

"He's going to introduce me presently," I replied. "It's a 'plant,' I think. She's in with this Clark. The idea is to separate me from Vanderwilt, and I suppose he's got something else fixed to get Joe away."

"What did he call her?" asked Peters.

"Preston," I answered. Then I told him of the meeting in Broadway.

"You're right, it is a 'plant.'"

"And who is this Clark?" I asked.

"He's a 'capper-in' for one of the largest gambling hells in town—one of those fellows that lay in wait around the hotels, rope in country merchants who come to the city to buy goods, get them out for a little spree, and finish up by going to the gambling-hell to fight the 'tiger' just a little. Of course the countryman loses his money and the 'capper-in' gets a percentage of what the house wins from his victims."

"What is best to be done; decline this introduction?"

"Oh, no! accept it! To decline might rouse their suspicions, and our game is to let them think everything is going all right for them. But keep near the door, and when you hear a shrill whistle, break for the pavement instantly. Say you're sick, anything you like, but get away. Here she comes again."

The scarlet domino came sailing by. Clark perceived her, and, darting forward, bowed and stopped her. They stood a moment in conversation—Clark, the lady in the scarlet domino, and the man dressed as the red devil; then Clark left them and came to me.

"Now I will introduce you, if you like, he said.

"I shall be delighted," I replied.

So Clark took me out and introduced the lady in the scarlet domino to me as Miss Preston. I bowed in acknowledgment. She asked the red devil to excuse her; his Satanic Majesty said, "Certainly." I took Miss Preston's arm, and we commenced prounenading up and down the ball-room—I of course timing our walk so as to keep within easy distance of the door.

After a short conversation of about a quarter of an hour, I came to the conclusion that Miss Jennie Preston was about as near a fool as she could possibly be without being one. It did not take me long to find out what her motive was for playing this "little game." Clark had told her that I had just returned from the gold-mines and was absolutely rolling in wealth. I gathered this from her conversation. She tried the course usually adopted in these cases. She spoke of the cold, heartless world—of the strong, never-dying love of woman and faithlessness of man—what heartless creatures we were—how that she never, never could possibly be brought to love any wicked, cruel man, she knew she never would! During all the conversation I had been keeping a wary eye on the three black dominos by the door, but at the end of her speech, as I turned round, the three forms had disappeared in the crowd. The time for action was coming.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DANCE-HOUSE IN WATER STREET.

MISS PRESTON and I continued our promenade for perhaps a half an hour after I had noted the disappearance of the three black dominos. I had been listening intently for the whistle, the signal for me to leave the ball-room.

As we walked up and down, I tried in vain to discover my three friends. There were plenty of black dominos all around me, but none of them were marked with the white paint—the capital device that Peters had adopted to enable him to know us in the crowd.

While I was waiting for the time for action I amused myself by pretending to feel the deepest admiration for Miss Jennie, who leaned so lovingly upon my arm. But, in my heart, I compared her to the blue-eyed golden-haired Nell, and the thought absolutely made me loathe her. Yet she was what men would call pretty. As I looked upon the crowd of gayly-dressed masqueraders before me, I noticed one, enveloped in a black domino, who seemed to be alone, and also seemed to be seeking some one. As he came nearer he turned, and I saw the white paint-spot upon the right arm. It was Joe. By some ruse, he had been separated from Clark and Vanderwilt. I felt that it was necessary to warn him of the signal appointment by the detective, so that he could also be at hand to take part in the approaching drama soon to be enacted.

"Will you excuse me for a minute, Miss Preston, while I speak to a friend?" I asked.

"You will come right back!" she said. It was evident her orders were not to lose sight of me.

"Certainly," I answered, gallantly.

A few steps brought me to the black domino.

"Joe!" I said.

"That's me," replied the Spider's well-known voice. "Is that you? Cuss me, ef I believe I could tell my grandmother in these rags," he muttered.

"How did you become separated from Clark and Vanderwilt?"

"Wal—you see, we got into a big crowd, an' a durned cuss—a big, red devil—got a-hold on me, an' afore I knew it I lost the other fellows. I kinder got r'iled when I looked round an' couldn't see 'em anywhar, an' I just told Mr. Red Devil, that had a-hold onto my arm, that ef he didn't let go, I'd walk into his affections lively. You ought to have seen him git up and dust when I drew back to give him one."

"Joe," I said, "that fellow dressed as a red devil is a confederate of Clark's; it was a 'put-up job' to separate you from Vanderwilt. While the devil had you, Clark drew Vanderwilt off in another direction."

"Blazes it were!" cried Joe, disgusted. "If I come across that devil, I'll welt rocks out o' him."

"Look out you don't get into trouble with the police, because that's just what they want. If they can get us out of the way to-night they'll fix the savant and the will, dead sure."

"That's so! Now you're talking," responded Joe, sagely; "what shall I do?"

"Go and stand near the door. When you hear a shrill whistle, look out; that's the signal for me to leave the ball-room, and you just stop a moment and see if any one attempts to follow me. If I am followed, get up a row in the doorway if possible; then join me in the street; I'll wait for you a few minutes, if I can."

"All right, boss, an' ef that big red devil comes in my way, I'll give him a sockdologer he won't git over fur a week, you can jist bet high on that."

Then Joe began to make his way slowly to the door. I again joined Miss Preston, who had not moved from the spot where I had left her. She was evidently determined not to lose sight of me. For the next quarter of an hour I devoted myself to the task of lulling her suspicions, and making her believe I was desperately in love with her. In this I succeeded admirably.

Suddenly and without previous warning, a

shrill whistle sounded through the academy. It rung high above the strains of the music. No one minded it, though. All, of course, thought it but some masquerading freak. The time had come; I looked toward the door; I saw the black domino that covered Joe's person slowly approaching it. There was quite a knot of masqueraders gathered around the door. All was favorable to my purpose; now was the time to escape from my partner. She was leaning quite heavily and lovingly upon my arm. Suddenly releasing myself I pointed to the extreme end of the room.

"Isn't that Peters, the detective?" I asked. I could see her lips tremble as she looked in the direction I indicated. The moment she turned her face away from me, I ran noiselessly through the crowd for the door. Just as I reached it, the fellow dressed as a red devil, who had evidently been watching me with two others—one dressed as a brigand, the other as a Turk—sprung forward as if to detain me, thinking, probably, that I would regard this as a piece of masquerading pleasantry. But, before they could lay hands upon me, Joe, who had been watching for his particular friend, the red devil, jumped to my rescue; he bit the red devil a whack in the face which smashed his false nose and sent him reeling back into a group of ladies disguised as flower girls. The red devil, in endeavoring to save himself from falling, caught hold of them; they all caught hold of each other, and the consequence was that the whole party came tumbling to the floor in a mixed heap, while the screams of the ladies pealed on the air. The red devil disposed of, Joe turned his attention to the brigand, and doubled him up in mortal agony with a blow in the stomach. Then he grappled with the Turk, and seizing him by the collar and the waist, raised him clear off his feet and slung him head-first against a couple of policemen, who had rushed in to suppress the disturbance. All three came to the ground together. The Turk, astonished at the attack and the suddenness of his downfall, and imagining that he was still grappling with his antagonist, struck out lustily and hit one of the policemen in the eye; he, of course, retaliated, and the consequence was a brisk little skirmish between the two policemen, the Turk, and several of the bystanders, who had first ran to separate the combatants and then joined in the *melee*. Under cover of this timely diversion, Joe and I made our retreat.

We hastily stripped off our dominos and masks as we ran down the steps. On the pavement we found Peters.

"Jump into that hack, quick!" he said, pointing to one that stood near the curbstone. We obeyed instantly. The moment we were in, the hack started.

"I guess that red devil won't fool round any more fellers in black dominos, fur some time," muttered Joe to me, with an air of satisfaction.

"Where are we bound, Peters?" I asked.

"To one of the roughest places in New York—Allen's dance-house in Water street."

"Has Clark taken Vanderwilt there?"

"Yes; can't you see the 'little game'? He's gone down there to see the sights. After they've been there a little while, they'll take Vanderwilt into a private room and induce him to drink something; the liquor'll be drugged; it will put him to sleep almost instantly, and then they'll 'go through him' for that will."

"How did you learn this?" I asked.

"Why, it was just as easy as falling off a log. I don't know as you noticed it, but when you left the hack to enter the academy, Clark told the driver to wait; that he should want him inside of an hour or so. Hank, my partner, heard this; so he instantly told the hack-driver who he was—that he was a detective officer on a 'lay,' and that he wanted his assistance. So that, when this Clark came down with a pal of his and Vanderwilt, and gave the direction where to drive, the driver repeated it in quite a loud voice, so that I could hear it in the doorway where I was hid. Hank quietly got on the box with the driver, in case the direction was 'put up' to throw us off the scent; wherever they go, he'll go with them."

"Peters, you have worked this case up capital-ly!" I exclaimed.

"Well, things haven't gone bad."

"Bad? They couldn't very well go better."

"That's about so, I think myself. Their 'little game' was good, though, but as we could guess pretty well what their movements would be, we kinder had the inside track," replied the detective, rubbing his hands quietly together with an air of satisfaction.

On we went, rattling over the pavements. I thought the situation all over. If I could only surprise the agent of Livingstone, just as he got the will in his hand, he probably, rather than give it up to me, would destroy it. This was a reasonable supposition, because, of course, Livingstone had not told this Clark all the particulars in regard to this will. He had probably told him to steal it at all hazards, but had not given express injunctions to preserve it. Livingstone's game was to get the will into his hands; then, if events were to occur to bring forward the claim of Salome, his half-sister, and prove that claim, why, he could produce the will

and take one-half the estate, under its conditions, for himself and his sister, Olive. But if the orphan child could not prove her right, why, he could hold the will back and enjoy the whole of the property. So it was clearly to his interest to hold the will, not to have it destroyed. But, as I said before, it was ten to one that he had not explained this to his tool, Clark. So the chances were that, if we could surprise Clark with the will in his possession, he would probably attempt to destroy it, thinking that, by so doing, he was carrying out the wishes of his employer.

At last we arrived in Water street. Our hack stopped at a corner, three blocks from the dance-house, so as not to excite suspicion by drawing up to the door. We got out and walked up the street. At the corner just below the dance-house another hack was standing. Peters pointed it out.

"That's what brought the game we are in search of," he said.

Just before we reached the dance-house, Hank stepped out from the shadow of a doorway.

"How are things?" questioned Peters.

"All serene!" answered Hank, laconically. I had noticed, during my short acquaintance with this long-legged, countryfied-looking detective, that he was sparing of words; "they've gone upstairs to try some of Allen's forty-rod whisky. I've fixed it all right with Allen; told him we were on a 'lay,' he's very anxious to keep in with the police. We might as well go for 'em."

We acted on his suggestion at once. On entering the dance-house, we found it well filled. Dancing was going on briskly. The principal patrons of the place seemed to be sailors and longshoremen; together with a few better-dressed men, who had been attracted apparently by curiosity to see the den of the "Wickedest Man in New York."

We passed through the dance-house saloon, and went up the narrow staircase. At the top of the stairs, Hank, who led the way, motioned for us to walk quietly. He stopped before a door; the hallway was but dimly lighted, but enough to answer our purpose. Hank motioned for me to look through the keyhole of the door. I did so. The key was in the lock, but turned so that it did not obstruct the view. The room was occupied by three men—Vanderwilt, Clark, and a stranger, in whom I recognized one of the roughs that had attacked Joe in the Hudson River Railway Depot.

Vanderwilt sat by the fire-place, in which blazed a huge fire, fast asleep. I saw at once that he had been drugged, for a bottle and glasses were on the table. Clark stood over him and had just drawn the will from his pocket and held it up in triumph.

"Go it!" I said to Hank.

Quick as thought, he applied his pincers to the end of the key that projected through the lock, turned it, and thus unlocked the door, and we entered. Clark and his companion started with surprise. The wily "secretary" recognized us at once. He saw that the odds were against him, so he did the very thing I expected he would do. With a laugh of triumph he thrust the will into the fire, and in a moment it was ashes! The game now was in my hands; the will destroyed, and Salome's claim proved, Richard Livingstone was a beggar!

"We don't want you; get out!" said Peters, coolly. Clark was astonished; he thought he had played his "little game" and won; but the destruction of the will didn't seem to annoy us at all. He was evidently puzzled, but he took the gentle hint given by Peters and left with his companion.

We took the sleeping savant, put him in our coach, and took him to the hotel; there we put him to bed, he still sleeping.

I arranged the plan of action for the morrow with Peters. He was to call upon the heir, Salome, tell her of her good fortune, and bring her to Livingstone's house, whither I was to precede her. I felt sure that when I showed Richard that I had both the heir and the proofs, he would relinquish the estate without a lawsuit.

And to-morrow I was to see Nell, the girl that I loved better and better every hour! To-morrow would be an eventful day!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VENGEANCE OF ALEX GORDEN.

I saw Peters about eight o'clock, just after breakfast. This was Thursday morning. I gave him the direction relating to Salome Livingstone's abode. I also introduced him to the savant, and we explained to that somewhat astonished gentleman what had occurred the previous night.

About nine o'clock Peters departed to visit the heiress, and at eleven I started for the post-office, leaving Joe to keep Vanderwilt company.

I arrived at the post office about half-past eleven. I walked down-town quite slowly, although I was in a fever of impatience. At the post-office, I took up a position at the upper corner and waited. Just as the City Hall clock struck twelve, I saw a dainty little figure, clad neatly in black, coming down Nassau street. Full well I remembered that little figure, the blue eyes, and the strange-hued hair, that the

sun tinged with its yellow sheen. I advanced and met her before she crossed the street. The meeting was commonplace enough. I held out my hand and said, "How do you do?" She just pressed my offered palm and said, "Very well, thank you;" then took my arm and we walked up toward Broadway. Once on Broadway, we turned down toward the Battery.

I don't exactly know how I said it, but, as we walked along, I managed in a very few words to tell Nell how much I loved her, and she, in a few words in reply, told me that the love was returned by her; but, I knew that before she had said a word, for she had told me so with her own eyes.

"Ah! Nell," I said, "we shall be so happy."

"I hope so," she replied, simply.

"I know so," I said, "for I love you and you love me. By the way, Nell, I have prospered in the world." Then I told her of my adventures, and how I had suddenly acquired a fortune.

"How was it, Nell," I asked, "that you came to leave New York so suddenly?"

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow. I have something, too, besides that, to tell you to-morrow; that is, I think I shall have. I'm not quite sure yet. You know you asked me once about my life, but then I had a reason for not telling you. To-morrow I think that reason will be removed, and then I can tell you all."

And so we walked and talked—talked those sweet nothings which are so pleasant to hear sometimes, and it was two o'clock before we guessed it was one.

"Oh! how late it is!" she cried, as I looked at my watch.

"Yes, time flies quickly, sometimes."

"I must go home, for I have promised to go out this afternoon," she said.

"And when shall I see you again?" I asked.

"To-night; have you a pencil and card? I'll give you my address, so that you can call upon me," she answered.

I produced the pencil and card; she wrote her address, and then I consigned it to my pocket-book.

"Good-by," she said; "come to-night and come early. Perhaps I may have something to tell you then that may surprise you."

"Good-by," I answered; "you may expect me the first thing after supper, and then, you mysterious little puss, you can satisfy my curiosity."

She laughed, bid me good-by again, and then we parted. Could I have but foreseen the events of the next few hours, I do not think we would have parted at all; but who can guess the future?

I returned at once to the Metropolitan; there I found Peters waiting for me, terribly impatient.

"Pretty fellow you are to keep a man waiting!" he cried. "It's after two."

"Never mind, we have time enough. Did you see the young lady—Miss Salome Livingstone?"

"Exactly."

"What sort of a person is she?"

"Well, she looks quite young—don't look much over seventeen instead of being twenty-five."

"Pretty!" I asked.

"Well, she is very pretty; she has the Livingstone family marks, as regards hair and eyes; in fact, she looks enough like Richard Livingstone, to be his full sister instead of being only a half-sister."

"How did she receive the intelligence?"

"Quite coolly, at first. It seems she made a promise to her mother, never to trouble her father, Anson Livingstone, or even to let him know that she was living. She seemed to think that she ought to extend that promise to take in the son, but, when I told her of the will that her father, Anson, had made, leaving her one-half the property, and how Richard had schemed to get that will into his possession, and had, by his agents destroyed it, in attempting to do so, all the old Livingstone blood in her veins fired up, and she said that she would put herself fully into our hands and be guided solely by us. I tell you, she looked just like a little queen when I told her about the will business. She drew herself up, and said, 'If my half-brother Richard had treated me right, I would never have troubled him, only for just enough to live on; but, since he has chosen to treat me as an enemy, I will show him that I am his father's child as well as he.' If I hadn't been a married man, with one of the nicest women for a wife that ever lived, she would have taken me for all I was worth."

"She consents, then, to put her case in our hands?"

"Yes, of course. I didn't mention any names, because if I had spoken of you as an outsider, she naturally would have wanted to know what in thunder you were mixing yourself up in the affair for. Then, if she learned that you were after revenge for his murdering your friend, she might not want to send her half-brother to the gallows or to the stone-jug for life. By the way," asked the detective, suddenly, "you've got Livingstone pretty well cornered now. This heiress will strip him of all his money; then, if you bring the accusation of murder against him, without money he will be powerless, and you can crush him."

"Yes," I answered, and I felt that a tone of triumph was swelling in my voice; "at last I hold the winning hand."

"Trumps, every one on 'em, or I'm a Dutchman!" returned Peters.

Then we arranged our plan of attack. Peters was to go to Thirtieth street and get Salome, the heiress, and bring her to Livingstone's house, where I and Joe, as a body-guard, would precede them.

Arriving at Richard's stately brown-stone mansion, I walked up the steps, followed by Joe, and rung the bell. When the servant opened the door we walked right in.

"Tell Mr. Livingstone Mr. Robert James, detective officer, desires to see him on particular business," I said, walking into the parlor, the door of which stood open. Joe followed close at my heels. The servant, a little astonished, at once went with my message.

Within three minutes, Livingstone walked into the parlor. I could see that he looked nervous and a little surprised. I rose at his entrance and took off both my hat and the light, curly wig.

"Gorden!" he cried, in astonishment, and his face blanched at the sight of me.

"The same, quite at your service," I replied.

"What do you want with me?" he exclaimed; and then, without giving me time to answer, he continued his speech; "Do you not know that you are an escaped felon—that a word from me to the nearest policeman would send you to Sing Sing?"

"Well, why don't you speak that word?" I asked with a slight tone of menace in my voice.

"Why? Because, Alex Gorden, I have done you mischief enough already. Don't force me in my own self-defense to strike you again. If it is to be your life or mine, I am such a vile coward I cannot sacrifice my own life, and must fight you. But, I'll make you a fair offer. I'll give you a thousand dollars a year to leave the States and live in some foreign country. Alex, we were friends once; I am not a good man, in any sense of the word, but I think sometimes of that old friendship, and I feel sorry that hatred ever came between us. You know, now, Alex, that I have the best of the struggle, and that I make you a fair offer."

I saw that he was thoroughly in earnest; here was one good trait in this man's nature.

"You are wrong," I replied; "you have not the best of the struggle. I have been pardoned. Your agent, Clark, was foiled in his attempt to secure your father's will last night, and destroyed the will sooner than let it fall into my hands."

He started at this.

"It was you, then, that baffled me there?" he cried.

"Yes, it was I! That will is destroyed. If I find the heir Salome, the child of Salome Percy, who was your father's just and only wife—for his second marriage was void, being contracted while the first wife lived—and prove her claim, it will strip you and your sister Olive of every dollar that you have, for you are illegitimate. I have found the heiress, Salome; she is in New York, and will be here within half an hour. I have the proofs of the marriage of her mother and of her birth."

It was thunder all around. Livingstone sat down in a chair that stood near him, his face deadly pale, his brow streaming perspiration in large drops. It was a moment of triumph for me. At last I had won the difficult game. I held the trumps—the stakes, he himself had said it; my life against his; and I had won!

The door-bell sounded. I hastened to open the door, for, as I expected, it was Peters and the heiress, Salome. I caught only a glimpse of her as she passed in the hall, and followed Peters into the parlor—he preceding me in obedience to a motion of my hand. I followed them into the parlor.

"This is Mr. Peters," I said, addressing Livingstone. He had risen to his feet, and the look of anguish on his pale, handsome face was painful to behold, but Macarthy's spirit was by my side; his voice said, "This is my murderer. Vengeance!"

"This is Miss Salome Livingstone," said Peters, introducing the slight veiled figure.

"Brother," said a low, sweet voice. I could hardly believe my ears.

"Yes, I am your brother, Salome," said Richard, in a low, broken tone, "although I have not acted toward you like a brother. Forgive me, if you can; I will restore all. I can make you some recompense—but, there is one other here, whose debt can only be satisfied by the forfeit of my life. I am not fit to die; no man is who bears with him a record of crime—crime that perhaps might have been atoned for."

"Perhaps I can plead for you," said the low, sweet voice.

"Plead to him, then," said Richard, indicating me. "He alike is my accuser and my judge." Then he again sunk back in the chair.

"You will have mercy, Mr. Gorden," said Salome Livingstone, addressing me, at the same moment raising up the heavy black veil that had concealed her features, and revealing to my gaze the steel-blue eyes and yellow hair of Nell, the Orange Girl!

Of course I had suspected this from the moment she had spoken, as probably the reader had. Then flashed upon me the truth. The story that Nell had told me of her life, slight as it was, was still the story of the heiress Salome. My name never being mentioned in the affair, of course she had no suspicion that I knew anything about it. This was the secret that she was to tell me on the morrow.

Livingstone sat before me, the criminal, waiting for his sentence. What should it be? I had sworn to Macarthy to avenge his death; I had avenged it, for I had stripped his murderer of wealth and station. Should I go further?

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," a low, sweet voice whispered in my ear, and a little hand stole into mine with a gentle pressure.

"Richard Livingstone, I will make you the same offer that you made me a moment ago. Go to a foreign land; you shall have a certain amount of money each year. You are young; a new life is before you. In that new life strive to forget the old."

This was my vengeance—a more manly one than if I had taken the life at my disposal.

A gentle pressure of a little hand rewarded me.

My story is done. In due time Nell came in possession of all her property, excepting twenty-five thousand dollars she set apart for Olive, her half-sister. Before the estate was settled, Nell and I were married; love like ours could not wait for the law's cold delay. We were married and we are as happy—well, as happy as it is possible for mortals to be in this world.

Joe hunted up his mother, bought a house for the "old woman," as he terms her, at Stamford, and lives there, amusing himself by cultivating his little estate.

The savant, Vanderwilt, returned to India and expressed his intention of living and dying there. He prefers the "Thugs" to the New York sharpers.

Richard Livingstone sailed for Brazil to seek a new fortune and lead a new life far from his native land. May that new life atone for the past.

THE END.

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